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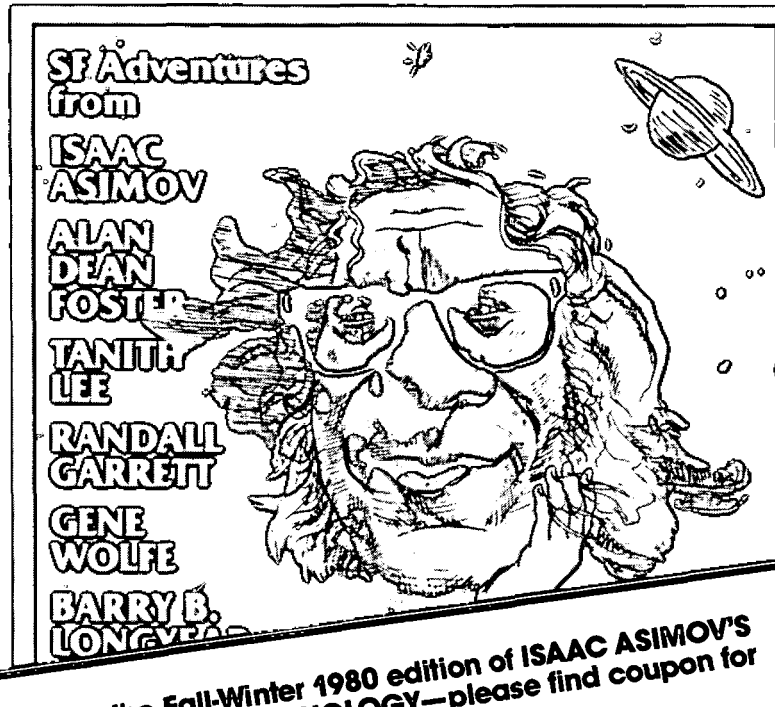

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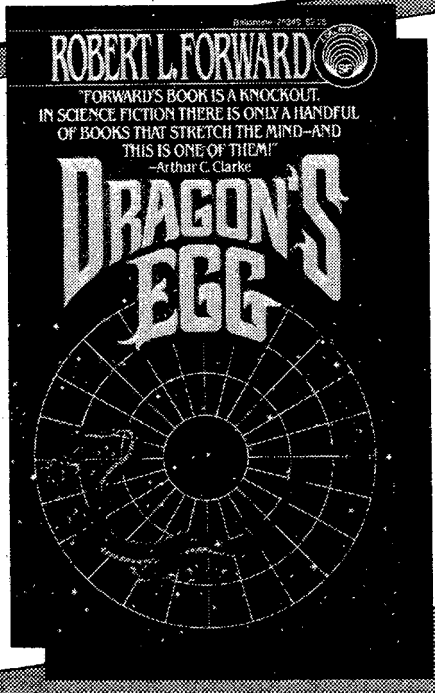
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COVER, "The Rainbow King" ..... George Barr 1
EDITORIAL: BOOK REVIEWS ..... Isaac Asimov 6
ON BOOKS ..... Baird Searles 12
The Dust of Creeds Outworn ..... Sharon Webb 20
The Dance of the Jolly Green Digits ..... Martin Gardner 50
ON OPENING NIGHT AT THE UNIVERSE ..... John M. Ford 52
Through Time & Space with Ferdinand Feghoot !X! ..... Grendel Briarton 59
These Stones Will Remember ..... Reginald Bretnor 60
THE LIMERICK CONTEST: RESULTS ..... Isaac Asimov 89
Snowflake ..... Freff 90
Silicon Psalm ..... Jeff Duntemann 99
Improbable Bestiary: The Bug-Eyed Monster ..... F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre 108
Full Fathom Five My Father Lies ..... Rand B. Lee 110
Balancing Act ..... F. M. Busby 128
The Rainbow King ..... Somtow Sucharitkul 136
THE SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR ..... Erwin S. Strauss 167
LETTERS 168

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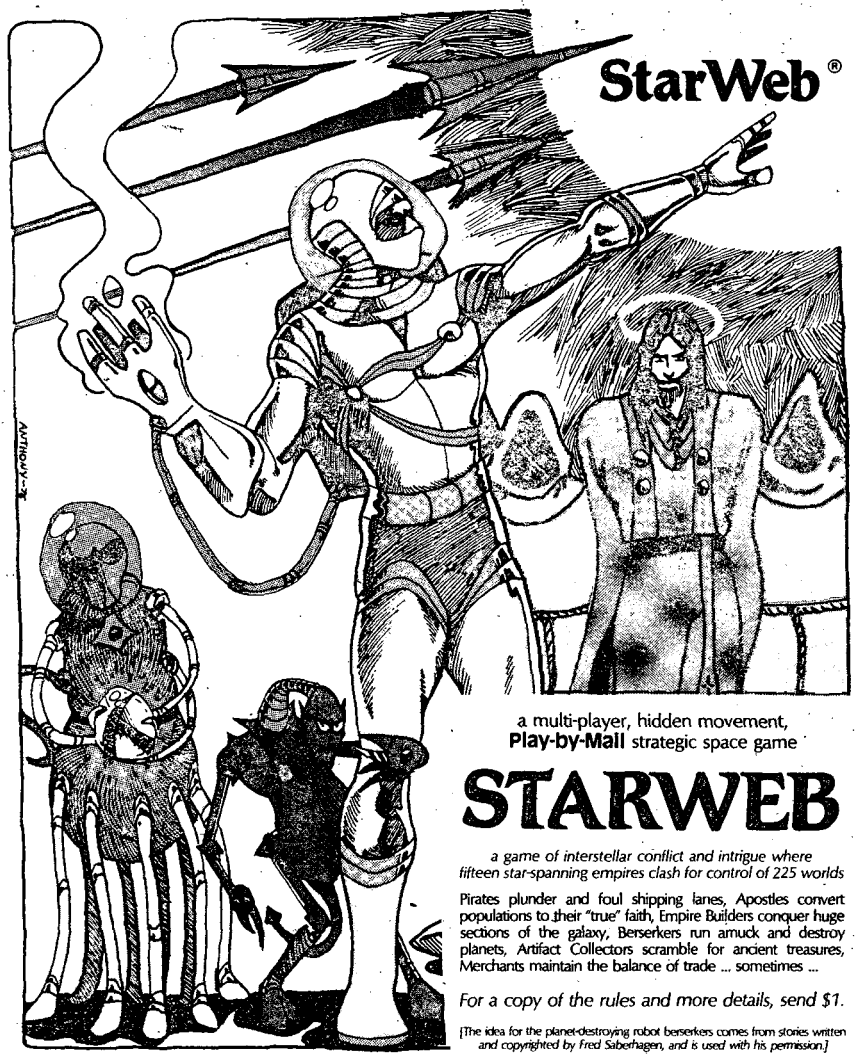

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EDITORIAL: BOOK REVIEWS

by Isaac Asimov

art: Frank Kelly Freas

I have never made any secret of the fact that I dislike the concept of reviews and the profession of reviewing. It is a purely emotional reaction because, for reasons that are all too easy to work out, I strongly dislike having anyone criticize my stuff adversely.

I don't think I'm alone in this. From my close observation of writers (almost all my friends are writers) they fall into two groups: 1) those who bleed copiously and visibly at any bad review, and 2) those who bleed copiously and secretly at any bad review.

I'm class 1. Most of my friends aim at class 2 and don't quite make it and aren't quite aware that they don't make it.

Unfortunately, there's no way in which one can get back at a reviewer. I have sometimes had the urge to do some fancy horsewhipping in the form of a mordant letter designed to flay the reptilian hide off the sub-moron involved; but, except in my very early days, I have always resisted. This is not out of idealism but out of the bitter knowledge that the writer always loses in such a confrontation.

Instead, then, I take to muttering derogatory comments about reviewing and reviewers in general.

But I'm in a bad spot here. This magazine (which is the apple of my eye) not only has a regular book review column, but has other items, less regularly included, that review one or another of the facets of the science fiction field. If I really despise reviewing so, why is it I allow reviewing in the magazine?

Because I *don't* really despise reviewing and reviewers. That is an emotional reaction that I recognize as emotional, and therefore discount. I am a rational man; I like to think; and in any disagreement between my emotions and my rationality, I should hope it is rationality that wins out every time.

Now let's get down to cases.

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A publisher to whom I was beholden asked me to read a book by an important writer and to give them a quote that could be used on the cover. I tried to beg off, but they insisted that I at least read it, and give it a chance.

So I did. I *tried* to read it—and the gears locked tight long before I finished. It seemed to me so unsuccessful a book that there was no way in which I could give it the quote that was wanted. I felt awful, but I had to call the publisher and beg off.

Now, then, assuming my judgment was correct, should that book be reviewed? Why say unkind things about it?

In the case of an ordinary bad book, one might wonder. At the most, it might only be necessary to say, "This is a bad book because ——" with a few unemotional sentences added. You don't crack a peanut with a sledgehammer.

An unsatisfactory book written by an important writer, however, requires a detailed review to explain *why* it seems to have gone wrong and *where* and *how*. This is not so much to warn off readers, who will probably have bought the book in great numbers anyway, by the time the review comes out. It is because even a flawed book by a good writer can be an important educational experience.

Its failure can be used as a way of sharpening the general taste for the literary good. It will educate (properly reviewed) not only the reader, but the writer as well, the veteran as well as the neophyte.

And yet despite the value of such a review, I could not in a million years review the book myself.

There are emotional objections. How can I say unkind things about someone else when I detest having someone say unkind things about me? If I can't take it, I have no right to dish it out. Then, too, how can I review a book by a friend (or, possibly, a rival) and be sure of being objective?

If that isn't enough, there are technical objections. Even if everyone were to grant that I am a whizz at writing science fiction, that does *not* necessarily mean that I'm a whizz at understanding what makes science fiction good and bad. Even when I feel a story to be bad I don't necessarily have the ability to point out just where and how and why the badness exists.

So we have Baird Searles reviewing books for us. He has the talent for saying what needs to be said and I am grateful that he has.

Now consider what a reviewer must do, if he is to be good at his job.

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1) A reviewer must read the book carefully; every word of it, if possible; even if it seems to be very bad. This is an extraordinarily difficult job. It is the mark of an unsuccessful book that it is hard to read; that it is clumsy, wearying, uninteresting, dull, monotonous, insulting to the intelligence, predictable, repetitious, infelicitous—any or all of these things. When you and I read a book of this sort, we stop reading. A competent reviewer mustn't. He must stick to it to give the book an utterly fair shake.

2) A reviewer must read with attention, marking passages perhaps, taking notes perhaps, so that he won't have to work from memory alone in writing his review, so that he won't make factual errors or unreasonable criticisms.

3) A reviewer must read with detachment and not allow his judgment of the book to be twisted by his judgment of the writer. He may know a writer to be an irritating boor and yet realize the writer's book may be great. He may know a writer to be a saint, and yet realize the writer's book may be awful. He must concentrate on the book and only on the book.

4) A reviewer must not only be a person of literary judgment, but he must have a wide knowledge of the field, so that he can exert his judgment of the book against the context of other books by the author, of books by other authors of similar experience or similar intent, and of the field in general.

5) A reviewer must be a competent writer himself, for the most literarily penetrating review ever written loses its point if it, itself, is so badly written that any reader grows bored, irritated, or confused.

6) Finally—and this is the point where even the cleverest reviewer (perhaps *especially* the cleverest reviewer) can come a cropper—the review must not be a showcase for the reviewer himself. The purpose of the review is not to demonstrate the superior erudition of the reviewer or to make it seem that the reviewer, if he but took the trouble, could write the book better than the author did. (Why the devil doesn't he do it, then?) Nor must it seem to be a hatchet job in which the reviewer is carrying out some private vengeance. (This may not be so, you understand, but it mustn't even *seem* to be so.)

These are not easy conditions to meet; and the fact is that though there are many reviewers, there are not many good reviewers.

And why not? Probably all reviewers will gladly accept Sturgeon's Law (that 90 percent of everything is crud) with respect to the books they review—and it holds just as solidly for the reviews they write.

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And is there anything a good book reviewer must receive from the editor for all that is expected of him? Certainly! In a word, independence.

When an editor hires a book reviewer, he doesn't (or shouldn't) buy a scribbler who has agreed to put the boss's opinions into words. No, it is the book reviewer *and his opinions* that have been hired. The book reviews in this magazine do not necessarily express the opinions of George, Shawna, or myself—although they might. In fact, George, Shawna, and myself do not necessarily agree among ourselves as to the worth of a particular piece of writing.

But it is the reviewer's opinions you want, not ours; and it is his you will get. He is the professional in this respect.

Baird Searles, in my opinion, is one of the good reviewers, and we are glad we have him, and we hope he stays with us a long time. He does not ask us for our views before he writes his column and if (inconceivably) he asked us, we wouldn't tell him.

And it's because reviewers can be like Baird Searles, that we have a review column.

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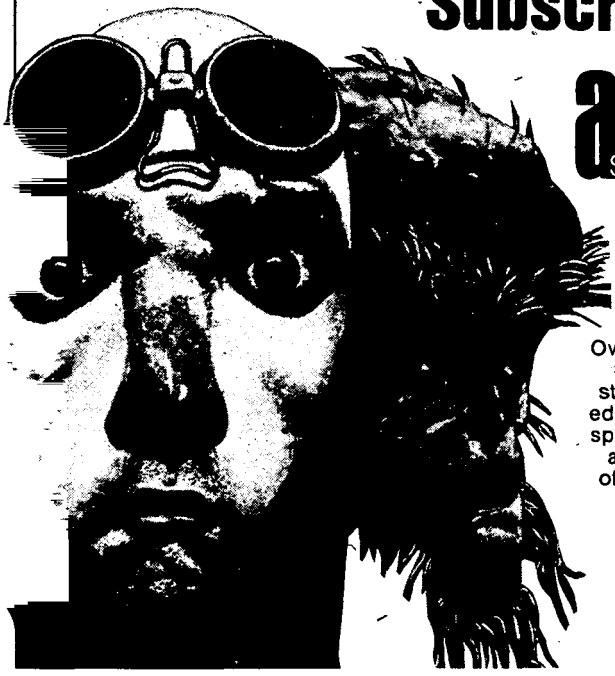

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ON BOOKS
by Baird Searles

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The Sundered Realm by Robert E. Vardeman and Victor Milán, Playboy Paperbacks, $2.25 (paper).
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Looking For Blücher by Jack Wodhams, *The Fourth Hemisphere* by David Lake, *Breathing Space Only* by Wynne Whiteford, Cory and Collins, $3.95 each, (paper) (can be ordered from the publisher at PO Box 66, St. Kilda, 3182, Australia).
Isaac Asimov Presents the Great SF Stories: Vol. 4 (1942), DAW Books, $2.25 (paper).
The Seven Deadly Sins of Science Fiction edited by Isaac Asimov, Charles G. Waugh, and Martin H. Greenberg, Fawcett Crest, $2.50 (paper).

Well, this month I felt like a high-tech SF fix, and with the kind of timing that doesn't always happen, what should appear but a new Hal Clement novel. High tech SF, or if you wish, highly technical science fiction, is in a way an art unto itself which consists in building a story around a complex technological concept without that concept getting in the way of the story or the story turning into a lecture from Physics 102.

Clement is one of the past masters at this sort of thing; his specialty is alien environments of unlikely elements that are still well within the realms of possibility, and expertly extrapolated aliens from these environments.

In the new novel, *The Nitrogen Fix*, Clement's "alien environment" is Earth of about 2,000 years in the future, when through some disastrous human meddling its atmosphere has changed to nitrogen with no free oxygen whatsoever.

The only terrestrial animal life remaining beyond microorganisms is humanity, which has maintained a precarious existence in this now deadly world (I won't say how; Clement does a much better job than I could). It is divided into two groups: the "Hillers," who live

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in adapted caves and retain something of civilization, and the Nomads, made up of surplus population who have been ejected by the Hillers and have somehow figured out ways to stay alive outside.

The story that Clement tells is nothing so simple as a conflict between Hillers and Nomads, who in fact are on uneasily amicable terms. He has thrown in yet another element, aliens who are called "Invaders" or "Observers" by the Hillers, "Natives" by the Nomads who believe them to be native to the planet since they can exist outside and the humans cannot.

Observers and Nomads communicate to a degree, but the aliens (who look something like erect fish with tentacles) have an incredibly different psychology, a sort of nonindividual hive mind that is interested almost solely in acquiring knowledge; and humanity is still an enormous mystery to them. Take all these varying viewpoints, throw in a fourth faction of dissident young Hillers who want to (gasp!) revive Science (the word **experiment** is literally a filthy obscenity to their elders) and who may have a way of freeing oxygen, and you have the basis of Clement's story. It's a good one.

And, as is so often the case with Clement, the star of the show is an alien, the Observer we get to know best, called "Bones" (because he doesn't have any, of course). In his sometimes frenetic search for facts—*any* facts—he is quite endearing in an inhuman way.

This novel, by the way, was published as a "trade" (oversize) paperback; and for once, the illustrations make the higher price almost worth it. They are by Janet Aulisio, and are very handsome indeed.

It seems, I'm glad to say, that H.P. Lovecraft is here to stay—his work, that is, and his influence. I wasn't so sure 30 years ago, when he was a virtually unknown writer whose friends and colleagues were promoting him after his early and rather sad demise; and I wasn't so sure 10 years ago when he was suddenly a very well-known writer with a rock group named after him (it takes some sort of potential immortality to survive that).

But this lonely, lantern-jawed New Englander, who wanted nothing more than to be a 18th-century gentleman, and who made a living rewriting and typing the manuscripts of talentless, would-be writers for pathetic pennies per word, has caught the imagination of several succeeding generations now, enough, I think, to be sure he'll keep going.

(I must report, though, that there is almost no Lovecraft available in paperback in this country currently; this not because of lack of

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popularity but because the rights have been bought by a new publisher who will soonish have them out in fresh editions.)

Another proof of his staying power and influence is the fact that other writers continue to build on the Cthulhu Mythos, that cosmography of terror which he created. Here we have, just published, *New Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos*, edited by Ramsey Campbell (who also contributed a story). Here are nine contemporary authors, including the seemingly everlasting Frank Belknap Long, who was a member of the Lovecraft circle, neatly spinning off of HPL's nastily fascinating creations, Great Cthulhu, Nyarlathotep, & Co., not to mention the Tcho-Tcho people (ugh).

This is a dandy collection, let me say right off. From none of the nine stories do I get the unique feeling that I do from one of Lovecraft's, but this is just as well, indicating that none of the authors were *trying* to write a Lovecraft story; instead, they are writing their own individually flavored variations on Lovecraftian themes. (The narrator of T.E.D. Klein's story, an old friend of Lovecraft's, remarks at one point, "Ah, Howard, your triumph was complete the moment your name became an adjective.") The major overt differences in the new works are a use of violence and even a smattering of sex that would have shocked Lovecraft no end, but otherwise they differ wildly. The omnipresent Stephen King introduces a pair of American tourists to, not a shunned house, but an entire shunned section of London in "Crouch End," while A.A. Attanasio sets his tale in the grubby drug underworld of New York. Brian Lumley also deals with tourists, this time in Hungary, in "The Second Wish"; Frank Long's "Dark Awakening," so short as to be almost a vignette, has holiday makers at the beach come upon a nasty object; the abovementioned Klein story, "Black Man With a Horn," confronts the old friend of Lovecraft's with a missionary to Southeast Asia who has actually been among the Tcho-Tcho people (ugh); and Basil Copper contributes a mysterious and oblique piece of science fiction (no, no contradiction here; much of what Lovecraft wrote was technically SF, and two of his major works were first published in the magazine that is now *Analog*) in "Shaft Number 247."

David Drake gives us an outbreak of tentacles and even worse things in the Belgian Congo in "Than Curse the Darkness," while Campbell's contribution, "The Faces at Pine Dunes," is a subjective one, "The Outsider" in a completely different key. Finally, "The Black Tome of Alsophocus" is a Lovecraft fragment finished by Martin S. Warnes, most effectively.

They're all good, but I must add that the stories by Attanasio,

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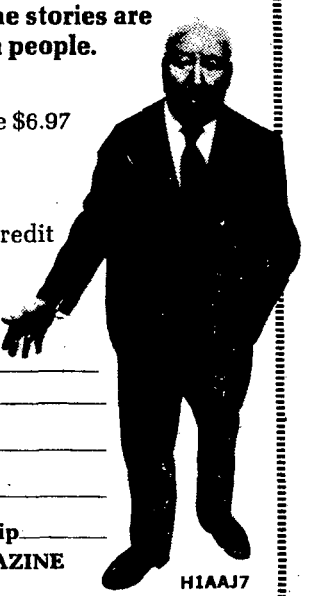

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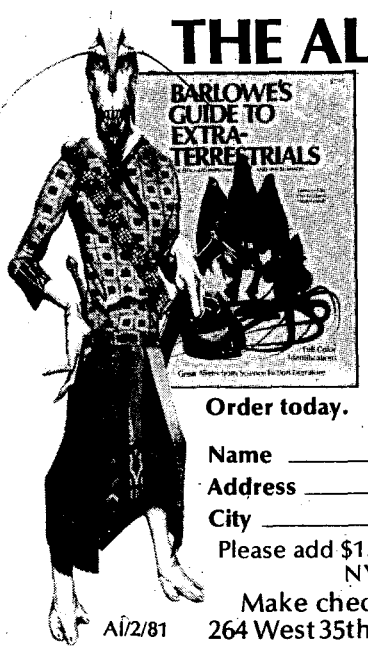

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Klein and Drake are extraordinarily well written, so well written, in fact, as to stand up against anything that's being done in any area of fiction today.

And while we're on the subject of frightening fiction, how does the idea of a vampire bunny rabbit strike you? Not terribly terrifying? Well, you're right, but it's a pretty funny notion, and in the hands of Deborah and James Howe, in *Bunnicula*, it's realized hilariously. It's supposedly a kiddies' book, but I defy anyone with a taste for vampires and animals (that likes them, I mean, not eats them) to not like it.

Bunnicula concerns the Monroe family and their pets, dog Harold and cat Chester. The Monroes find a baby rabbit in the theater while seeing a Dracula film; when they bring it home, Chester, who is, like so many people one knows, well read but not very bright, becomes convinced that the bunny, who has been dubbed Bunnicula, really *is* a vampire ("Today vegetables! Tomorrow . . . the world!") and is determined to save the family. Harold is a good deal more sensible, despite a weakness for chocolate cupcakes. Chester's attempts to thwart Bunnicula's supposed nefarious doings, Harold's attempts to thwart Chester, the poor humans' bafflement at what seems to be mass insanity in their pets, not to mention a blight on their vegetables, and what Bunnicula really is, make for a hilarious story. And Alan Daniel's illustrations are perfect for the story and wonderful in themselves.

The flood of heroic fantasy continues (not complaining, not complaining; remember five years ago when there was almost none?) and the latest first-of-a-trilogy in that area is *The Sundered Realm* (The War of the Powers: Book One) by Robert E. Vardeman and Victor Milán.

The Sundered Realm is a group of petty kingdoms dominated by the Sky City, a massive metropolis held aloft in a patterned path by a demon imprisoned in its base during the War of the Powers many years ago. The courier Fost Longstrider contracts to deliver a package to the wizard Kest-i-Mond, in the middle of which errand all hell breaks loose. The package turns out to be a jar containing the spirit of the long-dead but very voluble philosopher, Erimenes the Ethical; the wizard turns out to be dead; the thief who steals the jugged philosopher turns out to be the rightful Queen of Sky City, who is young, beautiful, and in deadly danger from her twin sister; and so on.

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I liked the book because it's not a carbon copy of anything else. The setting and events are inventive and the plot whizzes along. What I didn't like was a goodly amount of gratuitous sex just short of soft core porn (I'm all for sex but not gratuitous sex, particularly when it slows down the action) and a gratuitous dwelling on torture and violence just short of obscenity.

Nevertheless, it's a good, ripsnorting tale, and the impetus looks like it could well continue for two more volumes.

A usually gentler subgenre of fantasy is the lost race story (which might also be considered SF if you think of it as speculation in the area of anthropology and/or geography) whose heyday lasted from Haggard's Lost Valley of Kôr to Hilton's Shangri-La. A far less well-known example, that first appeared in 1923, has just been republished by a specialty publisher who makes beautiful books; this example, E.C. Vivian's *Fields of Sleep*, is indeed beautiful and interesting to boot.

The locale, a novel one, is what is now Indonesia. The race that is "lost" is a colony of Babylonians who have for millennia guarded a rich gold mine; the gimmick is a tropical plant, the effects of which make the lotus and the poppy seem like aspirins. The problem is, once exposed to the scent of the *upas*, as it is called, one can literally not live away from it, which is why these Babylonians have been stuck for thousands of years, letting strangers in, but not out of their Happy Valley.

The inevitable white soldier-of-fortune (the kind of hero they don't make any more) stumbles in in search of a missing heir (the kind of a motive they don't make any more) and falls for the inevitably ravishingly beautiful indigenous princess. But that's OK; this sort of story wouldn't be right without those inevitables; and in this case, it's brought off beautifully, with a surprisingly light touch in the writing and the characterizations. The inevitable catastrophic conclusion is also here, but most originally brought about; it took me by surprise.

As I said, it's also a beautiful job of bookmaking; however, the illustrations and decorations by Thomas Canty are a problem. Not that they're bad; they're exceptionally lovely. But in spirit, and even to a degree in content, they have almost nothing to do with the novel; it's as if they had been done for an entirely different work. But that's an individual reaction, and handsome illustrations are too rare for me to complain too much (though, if you've been paying attention, you'll notice that this is the third set I've really liked this

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month—maybe things are looking up in the field of illustrating).

And, speaking of the Antipodes (there's a line you don't get to use often), there are three volumes to hand from Australia which make for a slight dilemma. On one hand, I don't like to review anything that isn't at least available by mail order from within the U.S.; on the other, the books' publisher claims them to be "the first of their kind from an Australian publisher," and collectors and even the general reading public might well be interested in this development Down Under. So we'll compromise, announce their existence, and publish in the column's front list how they can be ordered; from there on, you're on your own, and don't expect this to set a precedent, i.e., all you publishers in Paraguay, please don't bombard me with books.

The three Australian entries are Jack Wodhams's *Looking for Blücher* (the unique cover copy for which practically promises the reader a headache); David Lake's *The Fourth Hemisphere* (which is the fifth in the "Breakout Novels" sequence which began with *Walkers on the Sky*); and Wynne Whiteford's *Breathing Space Only* (in which Australia is the last outpost of civilization in a barbarian world). They are, it should be noted, handsomely produced.

Finally, also the announcement of the publication of *Isaac Asimov Presents the Great SF Stories: Vol. 4, (1942)* and *The Seven Deadly Sins of Science Fiction*, edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg, and Charles C. Waugh.

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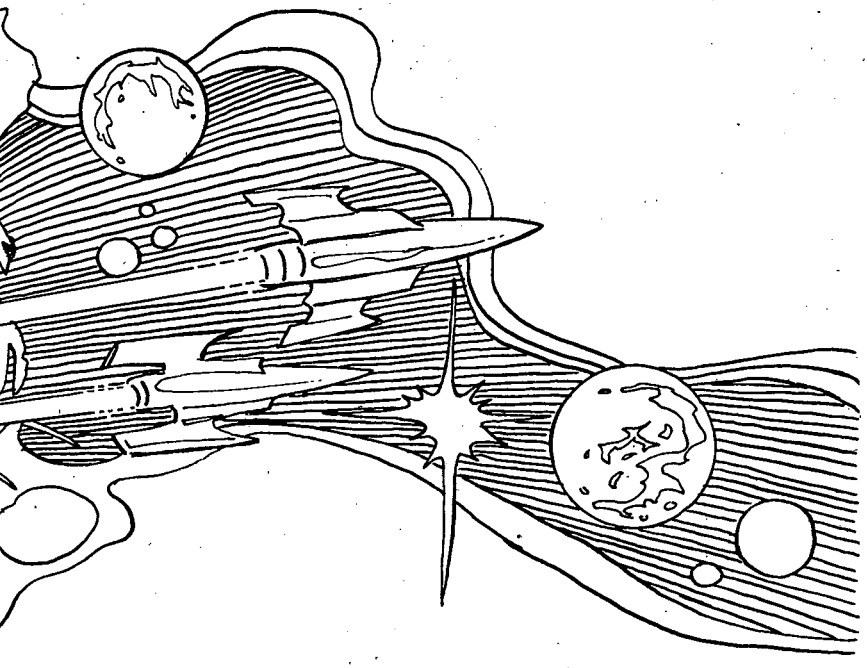

THE DUST OF CREEDS OUTWORN

by Sharon Webb
art: Hilary Barta

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It was the first day of Starbringer. Holeth's morning light sent slanting shadows among the crumbling towers of Old City and glinted softly on the girl's brown hair. She sat alone on the river bank and strung yellow globes from the bauble bush into a holiday necklace for her little sister to wear that night when Holeth set and the moons were dark.

Across the meadow a voice came from her parents' house—her mother's voice bearing an edge to it as keen as a knife, "Sayci! Quickly! Come here, Sayci!"

Vaguely frightened, not knowing why, she stood, spilling the shining little seeds from her lap, and ran across the new grass toward the house.

The door fell open at her touch. "What is it?" She stopped abruptly, staring in confusion at the men who stood there. They wore the clear blue robes of the priesthood, all three.

She felt a pounding in her throat as if her heart had lodged there and left a cold emptiness in her chest. They couldn't want her. They couldn't. Her eyes darted toward her mother, then back to the three men.

Without a word, the first man approached her. He held a gold ball in his hand. With a twist of his wrist he set it spinning along a circlet of thin wire. It whirled along an arc as wide around, wider, than her head.

The gold ball hummed as it danced along the cobweb thin wire. Sayci stared in fascination at it. Somewhere below hearing, below conscious thought, but just above knowing came music—felt, not heard.

The second priest silently showed her a tiny silver globe. It spun on a whisper-thin circle no bigger around than the space she could make by touching her first finger to her thumb.

The third man touched a blue globe—larger than the silver one—and it turned in the center of the silver circlet. They moved then, the three, and somehow the globes meshed together into an intricate spinning network that held her eyes. She wanted to look away, but somehow she couldn't.

They placed the fragile network on her head, a whirling crown that sang softly through the bones of her skull to the hidden parts of her brain . . . *Sister . . . Sister . . . Sister of Sol . . . Daughter of the Earth-Moon . . . Sister of Sol. . . .*

The three priests—still silent—nodded to her, turned, and left the house.

Sayci stood quite still in the center of the room. For a few moments

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she was aware only of the singing in her brain, and then she saw the fierce pride that burned from her mother's eyes, and heard her mother's voice whisper, "Chosen. My Sayci. Chosen."

They couldn't want her. They couldn't. *She didn't believe.* The reaction shuddered through her body. "No!" She pulled the crown away from her head. Abruptly, the singing ceased. She stared at the shining balls in their tiny orbits for a moment and then flung the crown across the room.

The humming died among the twisted little wires. The globes fell away and spun across the floor in three directions.

She saw her mother's face grow rigid with shock; and then, with a single cry, Sayci ran from the house.

She ran across the meadow and down the bank to the river. Stepping on flat rocks grown over with furry bluestone damp with river mist, she half-jumped, half-fell to the other side.

Her breath was gone and her heart flailed against her ribs yet she plunged on, startling a flock of yellowverts into flapping confusion, running until tall silverboles gave way to dense squatwoods that enclosed her in a heavy canopy scarcely an arm's length above her head.

She clutched at a branch, leaned against it, and tried to fill her starved lungs. Only then did she feel her legs trembling under her, only then did they give way. She slid to the ground and lay motionless, trying to make her mind a blank, trying to think of nothing but the sharp odor of damp soil beneath her fingers. She lay like this for a long time, drawing her breath in slowing gasps, feeling her heart quiet its frantic pounding.

She focused on a patch of helibore growing at the foot of a wide squatwood trunk. A tiny skitter prowled its turquoise web, tracing and retracing its path on the strands, helpless to move away from its self-made prison..

She drew herself up and sat hunched, hugging her knees close to her chest. She couldn't. She couldn't do it. Why had they picked *her?* She could think of a half-dozen girls who would want nothing more than to be picked—girls who had spent their lives believing in Genesis.

She could hear her father's voice teasing, "Sayci, my skeptic." And her mother's strained admonition, "Never doubt, Sayci. Never. Terrible things come to doubters."

And yet she had this streak within her, this *stubbornness* her mother said, that made her ask "Why?" made her say, "I don't see,"

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made her quietly, finally, decide that belief without proof was not reasonable.

And so after a painful lesson, she had learned to repeat her catechism by rote much as she had said her two-four-sixes, but inwardly she delegated Genesis to a place reserved for myth and fable. She felt her lip curl as she remembered the whipping her teacher had given her when she had asked, "If Earth is real, then why were people stupid enough to leave it?" Well, they might make her say things, but they'd never be able to make her believe them. Not ever.

Holeth lighted her sky, not Sol. Lethan and Elipta crossed the night instead of a single moon. Earth was a baby's tale. *She* lived on Landfall. Only a baby could believe that humans once traveled through the sky faster than a beam of light. Anyone with a speck of sense knew that it took half a day just to go from the river to the center of Old City.

She felt tears sting against her lids and she blinked fiercely to keep them back. She was nearly fourteen—too big to cry. Besides, it didn't do any good anyway. It was as stupid as believing in Starbringer. Her nails bit into the flesh of her legs as she hugged them to her. Small red crescents oozed when she at last let go and scrambled to her feet.

Circling the wide trunk of the squatwood, she knelt and pushed aside a clump of sevenseed. Cool air heavy with aromatic oils puffed from the eliptical opening in the dark bole. Turning sideways, she squeezed through, feeling the rough bark scrape across her back. A strand of her hair caught in the opening and pulled away as she slid down the steep incline. Her eyes stung with sudden tears at the pain. She rubbed at her scalp trying to diffuse the hurt.

Her eyes adjusted slowly to the twilight of the root cave. Feeling the pulpy floor, she followed her touch to the edge of the cave. Her hands slid over the fibrous wall until she felt a familiar notch and then another. She peered into the blackness. It was too dark for vision. She felt more than saw the niche, black against charcoal. She plunged her hand inside. It closed over the small sphere she had hidden and brushed against something soft and warm. Gasping in fright, she pulled out the sphere and rotated it. Soft light flooded the room and glittered in the sharp eyes of a solitary grayfur who clicked at her from its nest in the niche.

She felt a sheepish grin creep over her face. Imagine being afraid of a grayfur.

It sat with loose-skinned body wrapped over its cache of butterpods. When she poked a tentative finger at the grayfur, it spread

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its webbed feet and unsheathed tiny claws.

She laughed, "You're fierce, aren't you?"

The grayfur swayed back and forth, punctuating bluff with anxious chitterings.

Grinning, she said softly, "I guess we scared each other." She beamed her light away. The grayfur backed into its niche, flattened itself into the folds of the rough walls, and pretended to disappear.

"I wish *I* could be invisible," she said aloud. She slipped the circlet of woven reed that dangled from the light over her neck and sank down on the soft mat of bluestone that she and Jeth had stripped from the river rocks a year ago. It seemed like more than a year. They'd both been children. "Root runners" they had called themselves, playing within the winding passageways of the squatwoods, hiding from one another in the labyrinth of hollow roots that connected the woods into one living network.

They had grown up in that year, he in height and weight now a quarter more than she. They had grown in other ways as well, disturbing ways that she could not quite get used to. Like the looks he gave her now, and the way he caught her arms and laughed at her struggles, and the time he pinned her to the soft blue mat and kissed her hard and pressed his body against hers until she caught his with knee and elbow and pushed him away, all the while panting hard with something more than exertion.

Why *did* things have to change? She rolled over on her side and looked around the root cave. She could stay here. Until after Starbringer. They'd forget about her then—and she could go home.

As soon as the thought slipped into her head she dismissed it. No. They would never forget.

Suddenly, the enormity of what she'd done swept over her. She had run away from her home, from her family, to what? But they couldn't make her go back. They couldn't.

A tightness in her throat signaled the tears about to come. She felt her breath catch in sobbing gasps and she hated herself for crying, hated the futility of it, but most of all she hated her helplessness. Curling her hands into fists, she pummeled her legs as if the pain would drive away the need to cry.

After a time, she lay still, limp and exhausted. Then she slept.

The sound of footsteps along the ground above woke her. She was instantly alert.

The steps came closer.

Scrambling to her feet, she crept, half-erect, to the far wall. Coming to a round depression about a meter across, she tugged at the

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edges, pulling away a fibrous plug. Diving in head first into the tributary root, she turned around in the narrow corridor and pulled the plug toward her, blocking the opening. She extinguished her light and lay still, scarcely breathing, with her face pressed tight to the plug.

A scraping sound and then a thud penetrated to the corridor. In a few moments, a tiny shaft of light blazed through a crevice in the plug.

She was afraid to breathe. A few other people knew about the cave, but no one knew about the labyrinth. She and Jeth had hidden all traces of it.

In a moment, light shone in her face, blinding her. She caught her breath and blinked. "Jeth."

He reached out, took her hand and pulled her into the cave room.

She stared at him. "How did you know I was here?"

He pushed the plug back into place, sealing the opening, and grinned. "It takes a root runner to find one."

"But how did you know? Did you hear—"

He squatted beside her. "Of course I heard. That's why I'm here. Your mother sent me to look for you." He settled back on the bluestone mat. "I suppose you were startled when the priests came. But, now that you've had time to think a little— Well, you know you have to go back."

"I won't."

He stared at her with cool gray eyes. "Of course you will. You're just frightened. In a few days you'll look back and realize how silly you've been."

"I won't."

His laugh stung her. She snapped her head away and stared at the niche where the grayfur cowered.

"It won't do any good to be stubborn. You know you have to go. It's your duty." His voice sounded supremely confident. It rankled her and she felt her lips compress in response.

She was tired of being told how stubborn she was. That was what her mother always said, and her teachers. Now, she was hearing it from Jeth. It felt wrong—as if she were sitting next to a stranger instead of the boy she'd grown up with. "Why do you think you can tell me what to do?"

"Because you don't have any choice. And because you're being stupid. You don't want people to think you're a heretic, do you?" He laughed again as if he had been very clever.

She didn't dare look at him. A thousand thoughts seemed to crowd

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into her mind at once. *Heretic.* For all her doubts, she had never thought of herself as a heretic, not one of *them,* driven out, living as they could in the far part of the forest known as Heathenwood. She had seen a few, ragged and hunted-looking. Everyone said they were thieves. Just the other day the sheep-shearer had complained to the council that nearly half his wool had been heathened from his shed.

The heretics probably *had* taken it, she thought, but didn't they have needs too? Didn't their babies feel the cold just like other babies? They had to have wants and fears and doubts just like everybody else. Or maybe not like everybody else. Maybe worse.

She tried to imagine what it would be like to never go home again. A sudden image came to her—the look on her mother's face when she'd pulled off the singing crown and thrown it across the room, the slow look of shock and pain. Sayci winced at the memory. She hadn't meant to hurt her. It had all happened too fast.

The wave of guilt that passed through her made her feel slightly sick. She took a deep breath and then another until her control crept back. She turned and looked at Jeth then, tilting her head in curiosity, "Do you really believe it? All of it?"

He narrowed his eyes slightly in response, "There's never been heathen in my line."

"I know that. But, some of it, Jeth— Do you *really* believe that cows and pigs and sheep came from little glass tubes? And horses too?" She gave a short laugh. "Did you ever see a horse in heat? There aren't any glass tubes at all."

He stared back at her. "Well, not now. Nobody says there are now. But the first ones— The first ones were different."

"Do you think that one Starbringer night we're going to see Firstmen coming in faster than a beam of light to scoop all of us up and carry us off to Earth?"

"Yes. The good people—" he amended. "The ones who earn it."

"Even the dead ones?"

"Genesis says so. 'Just as the seed grows toward the light, so grow we. The harvest is coming.' "

Verse and chapter coming back with no more thought than an echo. She shook her head. Tonight tiny rockets bearing prayers would soar in the darkness. Messages to Firstmen. Pleas and supplications. And for the children, little gifts from the dying rockets would drop down from the night sky. Gifts from Starbringer. Promises. Be good children and get your reward.

Sayci stared at Jeth with something very close to envy. Every-

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thing was so simple for him. Why not for her?

She had believed once, a long time ago. Believed with a hope so fierce that it was physical pain to remember it. She'd spun worlds for herself then. Worlds that turned among the stars with a beauty that she could only wonder at.

She'd dreamed of dozens of starworlds, some much like Landfall, others wilder, even frightening. A few had no people, only animals—mythical marvelous animals—rabbits and camels, and huge striped cats.

But that was foolish—a little girl's silly dreams exorcized by the laughs and taunts of other people. Slowly she'd learned that she could believe only in herself.

It seemed that she had spent her life straying from the expected path, veering first to one side, then the other. It had to be easier along the middle. Why couldn't she fit her thoughts in with other people? Just a little. She tented her fingers and watched the distorted shadows they threw on the rough walls of the cave. She could believe in shadows, couldn't she? Even if they had no substance. She watched them slither on the wall in response to her movements, then she clenched her fingers together and sighed deeply. It wasn't any use. She couldn't believe. She could only believe in her own head and what logic she found there.

"You have to go back," he said.

She sat staring at the dim far wall of the cave for awhile before she said, "I know."

A sudden rush of relief bloomed into a smile on his face. He stood up and reached out a hand to her. "Come on, then."

She shook her head. "Not yet. I want to be alone for a little. I'll go back soon."

He looked at her keenly, doubt showing in his clear gray eyes.

She answered the unspoken question, "I promise."

When she was sure he had gone, she replaced the little light in the grayfur's niche and then crept in the darkness up the incline toward the opening in the squatwood trunk. She poked her head through, looked around for a moment, and crawled out onto the forest floor.

Holeth sent angled afternoon rays through the squatwood canopy and dappled the spongy ground beneath her feet. She headed down a gentle incline, then up again along the broad spine of a low ridge. Below, through the underbrush, she could catch glimpses of the river, a silver streak sliding downhill, disappearing only to show

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itself again when she passed another giant squatwood bole.

It came to her that she could still run. Turn around and run. She wavered at the thought. Stopped. Turned. In the split second between decision and flight, she heard something. In a moment she heard it again—a high keening sound. An animal?

She squatted down, shading her eyes against the light. It was coming from below, the sound, more like a whimper now, as if something were in pain.

Half-sliding, she left the faint path and moved down the low hill. She almost fell over the child. "Genni!"

She was on her knees beside her little sister, brushing dirt and sticks from her hair, holding her close, asking, "What happened?"

"Oh, Sayci. I comed to find you and I got losted. And then I hurted me." Fat tears coursed down chubby cheeks. "See?" A little hand pointed to two skinned knees embedded with dirt. One of her ankles was beginning to redden and swell.

"Oh, baby." Remorse swept through her. "Oh, baby. I'm sorry."

The little girl patted Sayci's face with a grubby hand. "Mama cried and cried and you was gone and I got losted and hurted." The recounting of her grim tale overcame Genni and she buried her face against Sayci's shoulder.

"It's all right, baby. It's all right." She picked up the child and, stumbling from the weight, carried her down to the river. She splashed cool water over the dirty little knees and dabbed at Genni's face with wet fingers. "We have to get you all cleaned up—for Starbringer." She began to sing softly:

> "Starbringer, Starbringer,
> Bring me a bit
> Of Sun to wear
> To light my hair . . ."

"Sayci?"

"What, baby?"

"You not gonna run away no more?"

She hugged her little sister close for a moment and then looked across the river, across the grassy little pasture to her parents' house, before she said, "No. Not anymore."

Shouldering the child, she stepped carefully across the river rocks to the far shore and began to sing again in a wistful voice that barely reached above a whisper:

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"Starbringer, Starbringer,
Bring me a wish . . ."

The rest of the day was to remain forever a series of disjointed scenes—a few sharp pictures connected by blurry in-betweens as if she looked through a shifting kaleidoscope.

Her mother's thin face. Gray-green eyes searching hers. Eyes misted with tears . . .

Her father's blunt fingers touching her face . . .

A delicate golden crown reshaped by those fingers—spinning, singing again . . .

Water caressing her body, warm against her small hard breasts. The scent of Nighttouch on her skin . . .

Her mother's voice. What were the words? What . . .

Her image in the reflector. Her face. Her best clothes. But the eyes—strange, as if they belonged to someone else. . . .

Was there time? It was so far to Old City. Would they be there in time? "Are the horses ready?" she asked.

Someone laughed softly. Her father's voice said, "Not tonight, my Sayci. We go a different way tonight."

A knock came at the door. A silent man wearing clear blue placed a soft yellow robe around her shoulders. The spinning crown sang into her head.

The man handed her a silver cup. A smoky liquid swirled inside. Its musky scent made her giddy. She looked at the man uncertainly. He seemed to want her to drink. She took a sip of the heavy liquid, then thrust the cup away. The taste hung like dark velvet in her mouth as the man took the cup and stepped aside. She looked out. Bewildered, she clutched her little sister's hand and stared at the roadway.

A Mover. She had seen only a few. They were powered by the towers of Genesis. Some said it was the same power that gave them light in their houses, although she didn't quite see how that could be.

Hands guided her gently. Then they were moving, gliding silently toward Old City as the last red light of Holeth dimmed finally down to gray.

Throngs of people lined the way as they approached the first of the towers of Genesis. Here and there were faces of people she knew, but different now as she viewed them from the height of the Mover. Nothing seemed real.

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The Mover came to rest at a softly lighted platform that seemed to float above a mass of faces. Her mother, her father, baby Genni stepped out. She moved too, as if awakening, starting to rise until the silent blunt figure beside her stopped her with a touch.

Her eyes darted toward the platform. They stood there, the three people she loved most. She was leaving them behind. A cold emptiness grew inside her. She was really going.

Her father's fingers rose in parting. Her mother's lips moved with the whispered words, "Go in grace." And Genni's eyes were round and dark as waterflowers.

Numb, she watched them for a moment until the Mover glided on.

They came to a wide opening in the second of the three towers. The Mover slid inside. They seemed to be within a central shaft. They rose quickly. The walls blurred in shifting blue and gold patterns until her head spun.

Something—*something* seemed written on the walls. Not words—something else. Her lids felt heavy and her head began to ache.

Then the Mover stopped. Hands thrust her out into darkness.

Far below she could see soft lights floating across a mass of faces. The two neighboring towers of Genesis rose like accusing fingers of ink above the glow.

As she looked down, the lights below her began to dim. As they faded, a brilliant shaft of yellow light pinioned her.

A roar of voices rose from below.

Disoriented, half-blinded by the light, it took her a moment before she saw the lights blazing from the other towers, blue from one, silver the other, and the single figure of a girl on each.

She was plunged suddenly into blackness. The voice of the crowd died abruptly. At first, she could see nothing but the afterglow of the yellow light on her retinas, then it seemed as if she had gone blind. There was nothing but black above her, patterned with needle points of silver.

Then she remembered. Starbringer. The first night when both Lethan and Elipta sent no light. The night when it was possible to see even the dimmest of the stars. To see . . . For a moment she was a little girl again, hoping for a sign. Hoping to see a star that was not a star—the Firstmen.

From far below came the hiss of a rocket. It spewed upward toward her, exploding with a deafening report. Its bright blue flare blossomed in the night. A tiny circle of silk dropped from the dying

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rocket bearing its little burden of gifts for the children.

Another hiss. Another. Brilliant fire-flowers bloomed around her. She whirled, giddy with the sight, and gasped. A man with eyes black as wells reached out, touched her, steadied her.

Flickering blue, then gold, washed across his face. His eyes reflected a dark light that chilled her. His thin lips quirked in sardonic greeting.

Her head throbbed. She was going to be sick. She had to hold on. Had to.

The whirling crown sang against the bones of her skull . . . *Sister . . . Sister of Sol . . . Daughter of the Earth-Moon . . . Sister . . . Sister . . .*

She felt her lips open, heard herself say, "Help me," before she lost consciousness.

Dim light silvered the room. Sayci moaned and stirred in her sleep. In another moment she woke, staring around her with eyes widening. She was lying on a warm pallet that seemed molded to fit her body. Something just below hearing seemed to murmur in her head. Words? Not quite. Too fast, too blurred for words.

Her head ached. She tried to move but her arms, her legs felt too heavy. Overhead, silver light glimmered on the domed ceiling. She turned her head from side to side, trying to shake off sleep.

There was nothing else in the room. Nothing but a series of panels along the curving walls. She tried to focus on the panels, tried to read what was written there. Squinting, she stared at them. She could almost grasp the meaning. Almost. But it wasn't writing. Not really.

Her head pounded with the effort. She felt her eyes drag shut again. What was it? What?

Voices murmured in her head. Voices . . .

Light more yellow than Holeth's woke her. It blazed from low on the domed blue ceiling. Dazed, she looked around the room. She sat up, leaning on one elbow, drawing up her feet. The bed responded to her movement.

She shook her head, driving sleep from it, and stared down at herself stupidly. Someone had undressed her. She shivered more from surprise than from her nakedness. The room was comfortable as if a warm breath blew across her.

More than a little indignant at being left there stripped of her clothes, she scrambled to her feet and watched the bed flatten with

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the release of her weight.

She walked to the panel marked CLOTHING and pressed it. When she did, the floor on which she stood slid toward the wall. The panel opened. She found herself in a room with spiraling suspended bars draped with garments ranging from pale yellow to vivid orange—all the colors of Sol. She stepped into a clear yellow singleset, tied it loosely, and padded back across the room.

She sat in the center of the bed, feet tucked under her, and scowled. They had *their* arrogance—leaving her here like this. Without a bit of explanation either.

She looked around the room at the panels. One said BATH. Another beyond it read DINING. Well, that was an idea. She got up and walked halfway toward the panel before she stopped short and stared at the inscription again.

DINING

She *knew* what it said. And yet it was in a language she had never seen before.

Or had she? She frowned, furrowing her forehead, trying to remember. Slowly an image grew in her head. The Mover. When it entered the tower shaft, there had been something written on the walls.

A snatch of a thought trailed through her mind—a voice saying, ". . . recall the second tier now. The symbols taken together have this meaning . . ."

It just didn't make sense. Nobody could learn a new language overnight. She turned the puzzle over in her head, trying to make it fit.

As she stood there, a tone sounded and the panel marked DINING slid open. She folded her arms and stared at the room beyond. Did they think she was a puppet? Or a dobbit to be led through a maze? She'd rather starve.

She retreated to the bed and turned her back to the open panel, but she couldn't ignore the odor of food. Her stomach rumbled.

Well, she *had* planned to explore DINING before the panel opened, hadn't she? It had been *her* idea first. Convinced, she got up and walked into the small adjoining room.

She had been hungrier than she thought, but there seemed to be no end to the dishes that emerged from the server. Anything she wanted it seemed. All she had to do was push the lever next to the constantly changing menu.

She read it easily. Stranger and stranger. A new language in one

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night, and food as quickly as she chose it—a meal that would take her family a whole morning to prepare.

Suddenly she felt a little sick. It was too much like a cage. Food and water rolling out on command—a nice clean cage. Well, she wasn't somebody's pet bluevert.

She strode back into the domed room and examined the last panel. Each character taken alone meant nothing to her, but together Sayci knew the meaning at once. She had no idea of how the word might be pronounced. It simply *was* what it said:

STUDIES

At her touch the floor slid forward toward a lighted hallway. A single room was at the end.

It was large. A comfortable-looking couch stood in the center of the room with a reading panel next to it. A curving see-through ran the length of one wall.

She looked out and blinked at the sight. She was still in the central tower—very near the top. Holeth hung low on the horizon, its light reflecting from the spires of Genesis. Old City below still lay in morning shadows.

A sound behind her caused her to whirl around.

"Greet morning, Sayci."

She felt her breath come fast. It was the man from the tower. Holeth's light washed over his white clothing and glittered on the golden sun-burst on his chest. His eyes were black stones.

She tried to slow her breathing. She wouldn't let him know that he frightened her. She wasn't really scared anyway, she told herself. Just startled.

A smile flickered at the corner of his thin lips—a smile that made her feel very young and very small.

Where had he come from? She scanned the room quickly. There was no door. None that she could see.

The man looked at her for a long moment. Then he said, "My name is Borth. Your preceptor. I hope you slept well."

She opened her mouth in surprise, started to speak, then clamped her mouth shut. He was the one who'd left her here. He knew about the language—he had to. And he was the one . . . She felt her face grow hot with shame. He was the one who had taken her clothes and locked her here in this fancy cage. The shame burned into anger. She produced her most withering look for him.

To her astonishment, he laughed. Chagrined, she thrust her chin away and stared at the see-through.

The laugh moderated to a deep chuckle. He caught her chin and

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turned her face up to his. "You are exactly right for Genesis, little Sayci. Exactly right. Now, as your esteemed teacher and guide to all things holy, I suggest a magnificent tour of the tower." He chuckled again at the look on her face. "I can see that you are caught up in a religious fervor."

Confused, she stepped back and looked away. She found herself steered by a firm hand toward a blank wall. His free hand reached out and touched it almost casually and tapped once. The wall slid open and they stepped into a small Mover.

The shaft they were in was lighted and unmarked except for periodic numbers—again in the strange new language. They dropped fast, then stopped at a wall marked **11**. Again the casual touch and a single tap. The panel opened to a narrow corridor which led to a wider one, and then one wider yet.

Like the root caves, she thought. And just as confusing when you didn't know the pattern.

They came to a large bright room. Sayci looked around in surprise. A dozen or so older girls dressed in gold and orange were at work in various parts of the room. Two read from the panels at their chairs. Three were gathered around a musical instrument strummed by a fourth. What the others were doing, Sayci couldn't say.

The girls looked up and stared at her curiously. Borth waved a hand in their direction, "Your sisters. The chosen of Genesis. One from each Starbringer gone by."

He led her to a tall pale girl of about nineteen whose fingers worked a tall curving sculpture. "This is Annat, little Sayci. Pay attention to what she tells you."

The girl glanced at him sharply then at Sayci. "Greet morning," she said. "Will we work together?" she asked Borth.

"Perhaps. If you think that another—" He stopped abruptly as a young woman with startling white hair came up to them. She placed her hands on Sayci's shoulders and looked at her with soft brown eyes. "She's lovely." She smiled gently. "What is your name, sister?"

"Sayci."

"We must talk soon, Sayci. There is so much to say to a new sister. So much to learn about Genesis." She kissed her on the cheek and smiled again before she turned away.

Borth looked at Sayci with an expression she couldn't read. "Her name is Layda," he said. "You don't need to know her. You are to remember this—Annat is your friend. You are to do as she tells you."

Sayci stared at the man and the tall pale girl next to him. She

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felt close to tears. She was being told to avoid Layda—the only person so far who had been kind to her. Well, she'd see about that. They might make her do certain things, but they couldn't control her mind. Nobody could do that.

Then she remembered the new language. Someone *had* controlled her. Changed the very way she thought. And if they could do that once they could do it again.

She looked around helplessly. It *was* a cage. It *was*.

"It's strange at first," said Borth, "but you'll adjust. Now, on to the wonders of Genesis, little sister."

They were in another corridor in the lower levels of the tower. Sayci guessed that they were underground. No see-throughs here, and they had gone down a long way in the Mover.

Borth's hand touched a slight depression in the wall before them, a quick movement of his fingers, then a tap—a pattern? A panel slid open.

They were in a large round room. She looked around in surprise. Involuntarily her hand went out to touch the wall. Stone. Gray stone, cut precisely—and from its appearance, very old.

As if in answer to her thought, Borth said, "That wall was built over thirty generations ago."

The room was dark, lighted only by an indirect white light that shone in small dusty niches in the curving wall. In each opening stood a single piece of glassware, each varying in size and shape, each empty.

She stared at a small cylinder. Underneath she saw these words:

CHAROLAIS BULL

Under another she read this:

PASO FINO MARE

Mare? A horse? Her eyes were wide and disbelieving as she looked at Borth.

"Impressed by our relics?"

She didn't answer. What did little tubes and bottles prove? Nothing.

"The starship lies just below us."

The starship. The words struck her like a blow in the face.

Borth chuckled deep in his throat. "Yes, Sayci. There is a ship. From across the stars. Still working after thirty generations—in a way. Enough to power Genesis."

A ship—a starship—here? He was lying to her, trying to confuse her. She looked around and shook her head slowly. Light reflected

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off the little glass containers in broken lines of white. They seemed to stretch—to blur. A starship here? It wasn't possible.

"You'll see it soon enough. But, not now. You have another duty first."

Holeth blazed directly overhead as she stepped from the Mover onto the platform that stood in the midst of the three towers. She drew her sun-yellow robe around her and moved to the chair centered on the platform. A tall girl in blue sat to her right, a smaller girl in white to her left. Below them a row of men and women in dull black sat facing an empty stage.

Townspeople gathered below them filling the streets. Vendors appeared selling pokes of hot fried sweets and chilled waterberries. As the crowd grew, people pressed against the edges of the platform, the smell of their sweat mingling with the heavy odor of cooking oil and the stench of horse-droppings.

She tried to blank the crowd from her mind, failed, tried again and partially succeeded.

A sudden clanging from the central tower silenced the crowd. In a moment, a clattering from beyond the towers caused the mob to give way below the platform. They parted to form a narrow corridor for the two sweating horses pulling the public-one's cart.

The driver reined the horses to a stop. The public-one stepped out. He wore the gold net of his office attached at shoulder, waist and left wrist. He led a girl carrying a baby.

The crowd pressed in around the girl and hoisted her roughly to the empty stage.

Sayci stared in fascination at her. She wasn't more than seventeen. Her eyes were wide with terror. She clutched her crying baby to her, cuddling him against her chest, shielding him from the crowd with her body and her long hair.

The chant began from one sector and swelled through the crowd. *"Heretic . . . Expose the heretic. . . ."*

The girl's eyes caught hers and held for a moment. And in that moment it was as if no one else existed, as if the crowd had faded to a meaningless blur that served to etch that look, those wide dark eyes, into Sayci's brain.

The public-one began to read the charges, his voice masked by the moment into a caricature of all the public-ones who had gone before him.

Sayci dragged her eyes from the girl's dark gaze. She stared intently at the tiny baby boy. His face twisted in infant outrage; his

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cries gave treble counterpoint to the public-one's sanctimony.

The words of the public-one seemed to merge with the muttering of the crowd until quite suddenly they were meaningless to her, nothing more than a litany of empty sound rising and falling in the heavy air.

The baby's hand doubled into a tiny waving fist. So like her little sister's had been. She remembered the feel of the small warm body pressed against hers. When her mother had placed little Genni in her arms, a fierce protective urge had welled up—a need to stand between that new life and all the hurt and loneliness that seemed to threaten it.

Heretic . . . heretic . . .

The public-one's voice droned on, paused, then stopped. The crowd fell silent.

The row of men and women dressed in black rose. One by one they cast their vote into the public-one's extended net. One by one they folded their arms and turned away from the girl and her baby.

Shunned.

The girl stood outside the protection of Genesis now.

The mob howled its approval. The girl and her baby belonged to it. Belonged to it until the girl could reach the sanctuary of Heathenwood. On foot. Alone.

Sayci clenched her hands together tightly as if the pressure would contain the sudden nausea that rose in her. Less than one in thirty reached Heathenwood alive—only the swiftest and the strongest.

The girl clutched her baby, and stroked his soft hair as she looked uncertainly at first one, then another, in the crowd. Her face was pale as salt.

A clot of dirt sailed toward the stage and broke against her face.

Sayci felt a trembling begin in her legs that transferred itself through her body. An old woman, face deformed with rage, scooped a wad of manure from the street and aimed it at the girl. It struck the baby's head, soiling his pale hair and his little shirt.

The girl screamed once. Then Sayci was on her feet, swaying from the terrible tremor in her legs, crying, "No!"

The crowd froze into a parody of itself. There was no sound now that Sayci could hear but the sound of her breath harsh against her ears.

A stone clattered to the street dropped by a man who stared, mouth open, at her. One by one, they dropped their missiles and stepped back, leaving a path for the girl and her baby.

She stared at Sayci, eyes dark and questioning, then holding her

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son tightly, she walked down the narrow steps to the street and turned amid the silent crowd toward Heathenwood.

The artificial sun glared down from the curving blue dome. Sayci threw an arm protectively over her eyes and rolled to one side. The bed responded to her movements.

She had followed Borth back to her rooms meekly, too stunned by the trial to protest his orders to rest. Now she wanted to sleep, but her head felt too clogged with thoughts for that. She turned and twisted through the labyrinth of her mind in a vain attempt to understand.

She could have been that girl. Could have. "But for grace and gratuity, it could have been me," she said aloud to the blue dome, to the sinking false sun. For the first time she understood her mother's fears for her. *Never doubt, Sayci. Terrible things come to doubters. . . .*

The image blazed in her brain—a dark-haired girl with haunted eyes peering from a glass tube in a lighted niche. Below her burned the label HERETIC.

Driven by a nervous restlessness, Sayci paced around the room. The blueness of the dome faded to purple as the surrogate sun dropped low. Suddenly, the room seemed unbearably oppressive. She touched the panel marked STUDIES and walked down the hall to the single room at the end.

The last rays of Holeth reddened the room. Squinting at the wall in front of her, she spotted the faint depression that marked the sliding panel leading out.

She placed one hand over the depression and tapped. The panel remained shut. How had he done it? She poised her fingers again, brushing the first, the second, the third in sequence then tapping once.

Nothing.

Her brow furrowed. She tried to visualize Borth's hand. Her fingers brushed again.

How *had* he done it? First finger first, she was sure. Then— Then, not the second, but the third. The third twice, then tap all three.

The panel slid open, and she stepped through.

The small Mover fell noiselessly in its lighted shaft.

She traveled the maze of corridors partly by instinct, partly by memory, until she came to the ancient room with the lighted niches.

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The must of thirty generations prickled her nose. If Borth had told the truth, the starship should be directly below her.

She wanted to know. If a starship lay below her, she *had* to know. She looked around the dark room, ran her hand over the smooth cold wall, and shook her head. It didn't seem reasonable that solid rock would give way to her touch like the panels had.

As her eyes adjusted to the gloom, she was able to see a pattern, dim with age, on the floor—a spiral beginning at the center of the room. She followed it with her eyes to the point where it disappeared against the far wall.

Following instinct again, she crossed the room. There was a narrow break in the wall, an overlapping. An opening—cramped, but an opening. Turning sideways, she squeezed through into a narrow curving hallway that descended gradually. It was very dark. She felt her way, hands skimming the wall on either side. Suddenly, light gleamed palely from walls that were not stone now, but something else, a material she'd never seen before.

The corridor ended abruptly in a smooth white panel. She took a step toward it, and as she moved, it rolled slowly open.

Startled, she dropped back a step. As she did, the panel closed. She felt herself begin to tremble. Was there a ship? Was there *really* a ship?

The broken dreams of a little girl regrouped themselves. Once again, the worlds she had imagined when she was small spun in her brain. "If—" she said aloud. *If.* But it couldn't be. Couldn't.

The taunts came rushing back . . . a ring of children circling her, chanting . . . *Say-ci, Say-ci. She be-lieves in ca-mels. Kept a ca-mel in her cap and it ate her brains* . . . the circle growing closer . . . laughter . . . *Say-ci, Say-ci. She be-lieves in ca-mels. . . .*

I don't, I don't, I don't.

The circle was a wall with little-girl dreams closed up inside. . . .

I don't believe.

She stared at the panel, wanting to know, afraid to know. One way or another, part of her life was a lie—part of what she was.

Which part?

With an effort, she drew a deep breath. Then she walked toward the slowly opening panel.

She stepped into a domed room. Shadowless light came from a source she couldn't determine. The top of the dome was clear like a see-through. Through its scarred surface she could dimly make out the rock that formed the ceiling overhead. She was just below

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the stone room then.

The dome was empty except for a thin shaft in the center. Next to the shaft, steps led downward.

Something was attached to the top of the shaft. She stepped closer. It was a small globe, small enough to fit into a pocket like a souvenir. It was battered and somehow pathetic. The surface was transparent. Through a patina of scratches, she could see a curving pattern made by what seemed to be softly-colored sand, gray-blue, white, brown. Then she caught her breath, remembering—a picture brought out by her teachers on holidays—a picture of the Genesis. Earth.

Scarcely daring to breathe, she reached out and touched it.

The globe turned under her fingers. The dome above her opaqued and the light dimmed and went out. She stood in blackness so complete she felt blinded. She flung a hand in front of her face, touching it, but her eyes registered nothing.

She fumbled for the tiny globe, found it, turned it again. At her touch, the blackness fell away to a star-filled night. Strange star-patterns wheeled slowly above her, fading as she watched when a bright star grew to a blinding yellow disc that skimmed away out of sight. And then a silver moon pocked with grays and blacks came into view and beyond it moved a larger globe of swirling blue and white so beautiful that she felt her heart contract as she watched it.

The Genesis.

It slowly faded, as the light in the dome came up. Then it was gone.

She felt her knees give way, felt tears well in her eyes. She sank to the floor next to the tiny scarred globe on its shaft and covered her face. It was true. It was all true.

She sat there for a long time with the thoughts spiraling through her head like dusttails in a wind. Finally, she stood and walked down the narrow curving stair into the heart of the ship.

Centuries of dust lay over each surface in the room, yet shadowless light gleamed on, instruments hummed, panel lights winked and cycled endlessly.

Her mind raced. All the stories of Genesis—true. Really true. She was standing in a real starship. And if there were one ship, then there had to be others. Ships that would sail toward Landfall one dark night and offer them other worlds—not just Genesis, but a whole universe of other worlds. She looked at the flickering panels in awe. Maybe word of them was somehow locked there. She reached out and tentatively touched a lever marked DATA RETRIEVAL. Then

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suddenly bold, she pushed it.

Words in the strange language she'd learned sprang to the screen before her.

A voice, its owner silent for six hundred years, spoke:

. . . Holethyear 389. Jen Medic, Acting Commander:

The cyan plague is spreading. Settlement population is decimated and, despite all efforts, the disease has spread to Tower Command. Twenty-five lie ill. Fourteen have died.

Machman reports that survivors from Settlement are preparing to attack. In an attempt to restore order and build morale, we have spread the rumor that a Sol rescue ship has been contacted and is on its way with a cure. . . .

She pressed the lever to forward, but nothing more was recorded. Skimming backward a hundred years, two hundred, she paused. Another voice spoke.

. . . Holethyear 180 . . . Trade continues with Settlement. With the completion of third tower, our defenses seem adequate. . . .

Back again.

. . . Holethyear 58 . . . The rock fort surrounding the Defiant now seems inadequate for surveillance of Settlement. I have ordered construction of additional levels to be used for this purpose and for the warehousing of grain taken in trade.

Once more Sayci pressed the lever.

Captain's Log of the Defiant, thirdmonth, first day. Staryear 1791, Holethyear 1. Karel Techman, Commander:

Food supplies grow crucial. It is necessary to require a seventy percent evacuation of the Defiant. All non-technical hands are to muster at once in staging areas for agricultural and survival briefings and supplies. Additional agriforces will be made up by lot from the technicians remaining.

Agriforces will be charged with supplying grain and other foodstuffs to the colony. Technicians remaining on board will supply the agriforces with domestic animals and other bioproducts as these mature and become available from laboratory. . . .

One last time, Sayci pressed the lever. The words unfolded on the screen before her; the voice spoke.

Captain's Log of the Starfarer Cygnus, fourthmonth, fifth day, staryear 1790. Karel Techman, Commander:

This day I am renaming the Cygnus. She will henceforth be called the Defiant by all hands.

At first light bell, the Defiant's disablement was complete, her weapons removed, her stardrive dismantled and placed aboard the

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Starfarer Aquila. At full light bell after final reading of the charges, Discipline Team debarked for the Aquila with nine hundred eighty exiles remaining aboard the Defiant. Thereafter, the Aquila cut tractors and engaged stardrive. We are cast loose with only limited sublight near a G5 known as Holeth with a planetary system of six, one believed habitable.

All communication with the Commonwealth has been abolished by action of Discipline. The Defiant stands alone. And yet, let it be known to any being whom this signal may reach that the people of the Defiant are not traitors. We sought only our freedom—the freedom to speak, to believe, to think as each conscience dictated. The Commonwealth may limit our movements and it may exile us from humankind and from our origins forever, but it will never, can never, imprison our minds.

She was running. Running as if she'd never stop. Then somehow she was on a Mover and stepping out on the eleventh level.

In the large room, several girls looked up at her in surprise. "What is it?"

She stood staring at them, hands clenched into fists, tears streaming down, one thought singing over and over in her brain: It wasn't fair. It wasn't fair to make her believe and then to take it all away.

A girl touched her arm. "What is it?"

Finally, she was able to say, "Layda. I want to see Layda."

The girl's face frowned with concern. "I'll take you to her."

Layda's soft brown eyes widened with compassion, "What is it, little sister?" She brushed a strand of white hair from her face and then reached out and gathered Sayci in her arms. "What's wrong?"

She felt her voice break, then fail, as she tried to get out the words. Only after a series of shaking breaths was she able to say, "It's all a lie."

A frown furrowed Layda's brow. Her eyebrows arched in a question.

She stared at the wall just over Layda's head, trying for calm, failing, as she told her what she'd learned. "It's all a lie," she finished, "the Firstmen— They'll never come. Never. We're exiles. All of us."

"I'm sorry you said that." Layda's voice sounded strangely cold.

Sayci stared at her with increasing shock. Layda's beautiful eyes grew narrow. They burned with a light that she could almost feel—a terrible shriveling light. She saw the woman's lips form the word

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"Heretic," and then draw back in a humorless smile.

"But I saw— I heard—" She stopped in confusion.

"I'll have to report you, Sayci. All heretics are reportable."

Zealot, screamed the thought. *Zealot.* She felt her doubled fist contact with the soft flesh of Layda's throat. She watched astonished as the woman's eyes reflected surprise, then glazed with pain. Then she ran.

She found herself in a small Mover in the central shaft. Had anyone seen her? She couldn't be sure.

Fingering the Mover's controls, she sank quickly in the shaft until she came to ground level. She pressed the panel with trembling fingers. The wall rolled open to the night smells of Old City.

She turned the controls to FORWARD and skimmed silently out of the tower.

It was the second night of Starbringer. Elipta was dark, Lethan hung low in the sky. No one was abroad on the streets this night. They were all closed in their houses, caught in silent meditation until Lethan set and brought the stars again. They're praying to Firstmen, she thought bitterly, and she tried to laugh. But the laugh died in a terrible lump in her throat.

A scrap of a song trailed through her head. "Starbringer, Starbringer, bring me a wish . . ." The lump in her throat grew as she guided the little Mover past the darkened houses toward the river and Heathenwood.

She hid the Mover in a copse of tanglevine near the river. Slipping upstream, she crossed at the shallows, stepping cautiously on the bluestone-furred rocks. The moon Lethan cast a ghostly light. The inky shadows of the silverboles crept in the night wind. Dense squatwoods lay ahead. She walked quickly, sending frequent glances over her shoulder. Every sound tensed the muscles of her neck. At every rustling sigh of brush and branch, she heard the whisper "heretic."

She thought of the dark-eyed girl and her baby and shuddered. She could still be trying to find her way. It was a grueling walk from the towers to the sanctuary of Heathenwood.

She came to the edge of the squatwoods. One of the trees she knew was partly rotted. Inside, there was a narrow hollow shaft which led to a root tunnel. It was the lair of a predatory blacksail she had disturbed one day when she and Jeth had strayed too near. She still had the scars of its talons on the back of her neck. She gave the tree a wide berth.

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Under the low squatwood canopy, Lethan cast a fine lattice-work of light that rippled in the wind like a live thing. She moved more freely through the woods now, sure of her way, more certain that no one from the tower followed. She didn't see the dark shadow that rose behind her. She didn't see it move in silent rhythm with her own.

She felt rather than saw the movement—felt it in the prickling of the hair along the back of her neck. She froze, not daring to look, not daring to breathe. She tuned her ears to the faintest sound . . . the sound of air flowing quietly, quickly into nostrils very close behind her.

Adrenaline spurted through her body. Her muscles tensed. She took a step, then two, before the hand closed over her shoulder. Another groping hand muffled the scream that ripped from her throat. "Quiet, girl. It isn't safe."

Her heart pounded in her throat, but she stood still, trembling, shoulders pressed against the broad chest of the man. "Quiet," repeated the low voice. He turned her toward him. "You've been hard to find."

She stared at the dark form, trying to make it out. Holding her with one hand, he fumbled with the other. Light flared between them. Dazzled, she blinked. The man was huge and dressed in rags. One of *them,* she thought. From Heathenwood.

"Where's the child?" He looked her up and down. "You're not the girl," he said in surprise. His light played over her sun-yellow clothes and stopped at the white sun-burst on her chest. His eyes narrowed. His hand tightened viciously around her arm. "Devil." He spat full in her face.

She recoiled and twisted in his grasp. "Please," she whimpered. "Let me go."

"Let you go?" he mocked. "Of course. The way you let my people go—among packs of zealots to be torn to pieces."

She trembled and tried to pull away. "Please. I haven't done anything."

He cursed in a voice so low, so intense, it chilled her. Her mind darted frantically. He had asked where the child was. He'd thought she was the heretic girl at first. "The girl today," she whispered. "She wasn't hurt. I let her go."

He delivered a stinging slap across her face. Reeling, she staggered and fell to the ground. He stood over her. "I've heard your Genesis lies all my life. I ran your pack when I was only fifteen. I saw my mother fall at my side. Killed by them." His face twisted.

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"Killed long before that by your lies." He fumbled at a sheath that dangled from his waist. His fist raised. Light glinted from the long blade of his knife.

She felt her fingers close over a handful of dirt. She threw it directly in his eyes. Grunting with sudden pain, he reached for her, but she was on her feet, crouching low, running through the woods. Dropping his light, he stumbled blindly after her.

She ran a zig-zagging course that plunged back toward the river. Her mind raced faster than her body. Ahead, the squatwoods thinned.

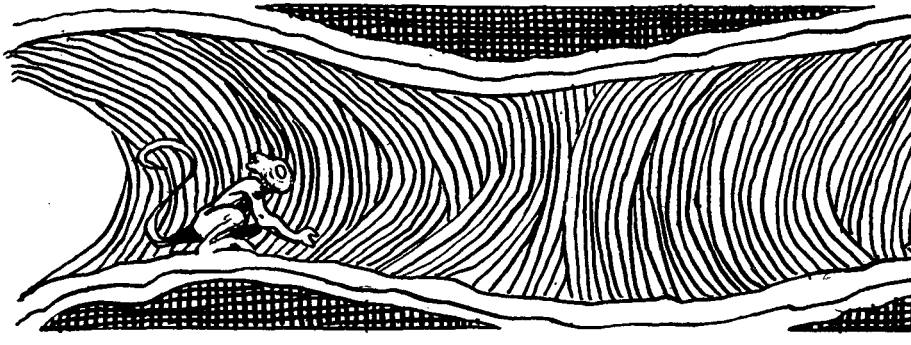
She darted toward the tree—the blacksail's den. The squatwood had a double bole. The one toward the river was the hollow one. She crouched and felt blindly for the opening near the ground, felt it, slid inside.

She fell heavily down the hollow shaft, twisting her ankle under her. Not stopping to catch her breath, she felt for the opening into the connecting root system. It lay to her right. She crawled through the narrow tunneling roots to the smallest she could scrape through, until she was sure he would never reach her.

She lay motionless in the close air of the root until her body grew still. No sound registered. She saw nothing. Her mind played only one thought—no place to go now. No place. No place. After a time, even her mind grew numb and silent.

She began to move then, her body responding to the feel of the long familiar root caves. She crawled through the rough caverns with a mindless instinct until at last she came to the cave room she had shared with Jeth.

With the last of her strength, she fell on the bluestone mat, curling in a small fetal heap in the darkness.



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No place to go now. No place. No place.
She closed her eyes and lay still.

A white light stabbed into her face. She scrambled to her knees, hand flung over her eyes. Someone knelt by her side. "Who— Jeth?"

The boy stared at her with unblinking gray eyes. Then a slow smile began at one corner of his mouth. "I've found you."

She searched his face. "Jeth?"

The smile blazed into triumph. "I've found her." His voice raised in jubilance. "She's here! I've found her." He circled her, pressing his body against the plug to the root tunnel, cutting off a line of escape.

Bewildered, she watched him with eyes wide with exhaustion. She heard a noise behind her. Whirling, she turned to face the man whose bulk blocked her path to the open woods above. She stared in horror at the man. She barely heard Jeth's voice saying, "You were right to come to me. I knew she'd be here."

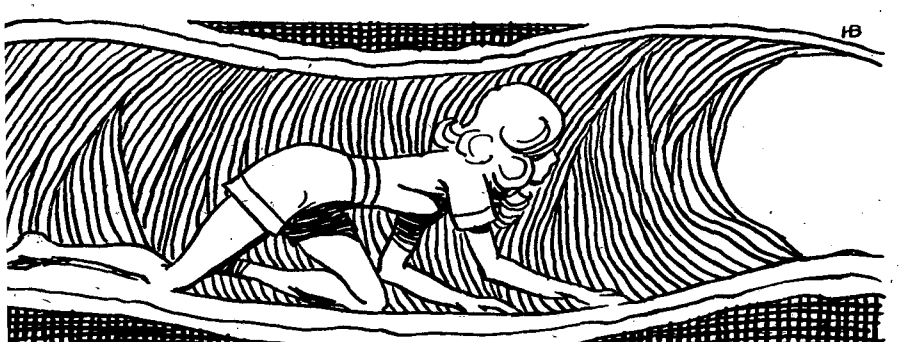
Borth's face above her in the cave room was dark with anger.

The Mover glided silently through the night as the last light of Lethan sank behind the horizon. She looked at them numbly, Borth and the tall girl Annat. Nothing mattered anymore. She was too tired to care.

Borth spoke to her for the first time, his voice heavy with anger. "You could have been killed."

A flicker of surprise replaced the exhaustion in her eyes. "Does it matter who kills me?"

The girl touched her shoulder gently and said to Borth, "Don't scold her."



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He looked at her strangely. Her clothes were ripped and stained. Livid scrapes covered her arms from her struggles through the root tunnels. Her ankle, dark with bruises, puffed above her shoe. A glint of compassion came into his eyes tempered at once by the sternness of his voice. "Didn't you wonder why you were chosen by Genesis, Sayci?"

She stared at him. She didn't speak.

"You heard the tapes in the ship today," he said. "You told Layda. And yet still you don't know." The Mover skimmed just above the ground. In the distance, among the towers of Genesis, the prayers of the second night of Starbringer began their fiery ascent. Tiny points of blue and yellow light from the little rockets bloomed in the distant sky. Borth touched the controls and the Mover rose high above the ground. Another touch and the forward movement continued.

"Nearly a thousand years ago the Firstmen landed here," he said.

"Exiles."

"Yes. For a cause— For the need of men to be free."

She had strength enough to curl her lip in contempt. He caught the look; he went on, "Six hundred years ago, plague destroyed most of the Firstmen. Their knowledge died with them. Artifact remained without understanding and the world fell into dark times. Then Genesis was born."

"Lies."

"Not lies," said Annat. "Hope. Without knowledge, it was all people had left."

"What good is it? What good is hoping? It seemed to her that there was no more substance to Genesis than a dusttail in the wind. "Everyone is waiting for impossible miracles. They'll die waiting."

"Not everyone," said Borth. "There are people like you, Sayci, who found they couldn't accept dogma without reason. These people became a part of Genesis too."

She looked at him, puzzled.

"A small, hidden part, searching for the lost knowledge, passing on the bits and pieces of it to others like them. Gradually as time passed, gathering more." He paused, "It's slow, Sayci. The more we learn, the more we realize how little we know. But we make progress. Some of us look to ourselves and try to learn more about our bodies—why we sicken, why we die. Annat is studying the medicines of the Firstmen, trying to discover why they work."

"And why they fail," said Annat with a laugh.

"Others of us look to the stars," said Borth softly, watching Sayci's

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expression. "We've been there before. Someday we'll go back."

She shook her head slowly as if to clear it.

"So far, the way there is a mystery. We know that a Mover can climb only a short way. Not as far as the larger prayer rockets. But someday someone like you will be able to tell us why."

Her eyes were a question.

"We don't have many answers, Sayci, but we *have* learned one thing. We've learned that people who think like you can learn from the towers."

"You were chosen a long time ago," said Annat.

Borth laughed softly. "The stubborn logical girl-child who drove her teachers mad because she couldn't accept anything without proof."

The Mover hovered far above the trees. In the distance, rocket fire illuminated the dark towers of Genesis. "Give her the medicine," he said.

Annat reached for a small cylinder and, pulling it apart, handed it to Sayci. "Drink this. It's necessary."

"What is it?"

"Something to make you sick for a short time. A fever."

Her eyes widened as she stared at the fluid. "Why?"

"Not all of us in Genesis are 'enlightened'," Borth said wryly. "It's a way to explain your aberrations to Layda and her friends. She'll be told you were out of your head with fever. Temporarily deranged." He laughed again. "She's not feeling well herself after the blow you gave her."

"Don't be afraid," said Annat. "It won't last long."

Shivering from her rising fever, Sayci huddled in the arms of Annat and stared into the sky at the thousands of glittering star points.

The Mover rose along the central tower toward an opening near the top. For a frozen moment, the spire of the tower was illuminated in a shower of blue and gold rocket fire. In her delirium, she took it as a sign. It was an omen she was sure. She babbled it to the night.

Bright-eyed in her fever, she felt as if she were riding a giant booming rocket—soaring far above the tower toward the stars. And in that moment, part of her broke free. She clutched at Annat. She stretched a smile over chattering teeth. She laughed out loud.

There were other worlds out there. Other worlds. They could find the way.

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THE DANCE OF THE JOLLY GREEN DIGITS

by Martin Gardner

Very much a number puzzle, this time around . . .

I was up late, working for hours on digital problems with a pocket calculator. Its light-emitting diodes displayed the digits in green, each formed by a subset of the seven separately wired bars of the pattern shown below:

I finally went to bed at 3 A.M., and during the night had a strange dream. The ten digits, each as large as a person and glowing a ghostly green, came dancing into my bedroom. The group's leader was Zero, whose round face strikingly resembled that of the late Zero Mostel.

"We have the pleasure," Zero sang out in deep bass tones, "of entertaining you with some unusual digital curiosities. For our first number—the largest square that uses all of us except me. It's the square of 30,384."

The ten digits danced themselves into this formation:

923,187,456.

"If I join my jolly friends," said Zero, "the largest square is this." The digits danced around furiously, chuckling to themselves, then finally stood in a row:

9,814,072,356.

"It's the square of 99,066," Zero announced. "And that's a number that is the same upside down." When Zero snapped his fingers, seven digits left the row to leave 9, 0 and 6. Then an amazing thing happened. Suddenly the 9 and 6 each became twins to form the number 99,066. Then the nines and sixes traded places and they all stood on their heads to produce 99,066 again.

"Next," Zero called out, "is the *smallest* square without me." The nine digits formed 139,854,276, the square of 11,826. "And the smallest *with* me." The ten digits danced to new positions to make 1,026,753,849, the square of 32,043.

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"Here's something different," said Zero. The nine non-zero digits danced to positions in which two of them formed 28, three formed 157, and the remaining four formed the product 4,396.

"That's the lowest product for a twin and a triplet," boomed Zero. "The highest is this." He clapped his hands and the digits danced to $48 \times 159 = 7{,}632$.

"Of course if I join them we get different solutions," said Zero. The digits first formed the solution with the smallest product, $39 \times 402 = 15{,}678$, then the solution with the largest product, $63 \times 927 = 58{,}401$.

"Now," said Zero, "for a truly remarkable number." First the digits formed 87,021 and 94,356. Then they separated to reform the product 8,210,953,476. Zero claimed it was the largest number of ten different digits that is the product of two five-digit numbers that contain all ten digits.

Zero made a low bow. "I know you need puzzles for Isaac's science fiction magazine," he smiled. "Here's a funny oldie." The digits roared with laughter as they soft-shoe shuffled into the formation 8,549,176,320.

"What," asked Zero, "is so remarkable about this number?"

See page 58 for the answer.

THE SLUSH PILE STRIKES!

Science fiction is a literature of ideas, and new ones at that. Coming up with a fresh plot-line is probably the toughest part of writing a good science fiction story. Many, many manuscripts we receive are variations on old themes that we wish could be laid to rest. Here's a whole list of the last lines we'd like to see the last of:

" . . . but it was all a dream!"
" . . . and then the Sun went nova!"
" . . . for the horrible monsters were really from Earth!"
" . . . and so, Eve, we'll have to populate this empty planet."
" . . . I'm calling this planet I created in school, Earth!"
" . . . for the time-traveler had *caused* what he had traveled through time to prevent!"
" . . . but—but you mean I'm already dead?"
" . . . for the invaders' spaceship was too small to notice!"
" . . . they were really unborn babies!!." (ants, frogs, robots, or giant lobsters) and " . . . for it was the evil extraTerrestrials that had made them all go mad (or wage war, or invent science fiction, or develop rocketry)!!!

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ON OPENING NIGHT AT THE UNIVERSE:
A Personal Voyage to Carl Sagan's *Cosmos*

by John M. Ford

Since the New York premiere had only about 175 people, anyone who was so inclined could meet and actually speak to Carl Sagan. We did, and found that despite the crush in Washington, he remembered Mr. Ford. We feel this is significant of something.

JOHN M. FORD

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Last night I was at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C., watching the first public showing anywhere of the first episode of Dr. Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* series. I was there as a magazine writer, to do a review—but after a little thought I knew I couldn't.

This is not a newsmagazine, and its deadlines are long in advance of publication. The first episode of *Cosmos* will not air for another nine days—but by the time this message reaches you, the last of the thirteen will have gone by (and I suspect we will all be waiting for the reruns). It's as if I were a radio astronomer on a distant planet, telling you of some wonderful local event; by the time the message crosses the lightyears, it is not news but history.

So this will not be a review. ("Last week's best bet on TV was . . .") Instead I'm going to try to tell you what it was like, opening night . . . and, just maybe, tell you what it meant.

So you'll know: at two o'clock Thursday afternoon, four hours before the screening was to begin, I was standing in the National Air and Space Museum, underneath the Voyager spacecraft. In front of me was a copy of the gold record aboard the Voyager, storing the sounds and music of Earth, engraved with directions for playing the disc, for finding its makers and sending a message back to them. Us.

And I thought about the record, and the Voyager photos of volcanoes on Io and thunderbolts on Jupiter and the Great Red Spot close enough to stir my fingers in (and by now—transmission lag again—we'll have danced on Saturn's rings) and I was suddenly crying. Nothing to attract any attention, but a few quiet tears for everything that could be ours, from the inner planets to the outermost stars—and how close we seem to having none of it, and losing what we have now.

I say this so you'll know how I feel.

At a quarter of six I was sitting in a polyhedral-paneled auditorium at the Academy of Sciences. I was early; the crew still outnumbered the guests. Which was just as well, because the crew was fiddling with an uncooperative projection television unit. Given the choice between giant-screen projection and several ordinary monitors for the expected 400 guests, the staff had decided on the former. It was proving a fateful choice. (Though the right one, I still think; having been in some college classrooms with the multi-monitor arrangement, I can say that the effect is rather like watching TV in a department-store showroom.)

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Three of the engineers vanished then, returning with a different projection unit which they set up a few rows in front of the first. These guys were *organized:* in three minutes the new machine was cabled in and humming, strapped down to its table with gaffer tape like the Bride of You-know-who. Then the engineers had to align the guns—which involves steering red, blue, and green crosshairs and grids until they merge to white, like Darth Vader drawing a bead on a Rebel X-Wing. I do not make this comparison lightly: as they worked, the background music rose, adding tympani and brass. You could practically see the Death Star rising on the horizon.

The auditorium was filling now: distinguished-looking people in three-piece suits or evening dresses. I was wearing a slightly seedy blue suit and turtleneck in lieu of tie. Distinguished? Don't even ask.

I was wondering what the guest list was like: Scientists? Network programmers? Oil-company executives? (The fine print on my invitation—in my pocket, should someone ask the obvious question—said we were all guests of Atlantic Richfield, which put up the largest share of the money for *Cosmos*. Hurrah for them, I say. Next time you're at an ARCO pump, think on Messier 51.)

All of them seemed to know each other, too. Who, me? Why, I have legions of highly placed friends. I suppose they were all averting global crises somewhere, or maybe watching part 4 of *Shōgun*.

When we were settled, Adrian Malone, the Executive Producer and a distinguished fellow indeed, went up on the platform and told us we were there to see Episode One of *Cosmos*. Many seemed glad of the reminder. He then told us that the program was American-made, that 150 million people would see it, and who had paid for it. He failed to say why any of these things was important in a time when Fred Silverman can get infinite bucks and viewers for *Real People* spinoffs and similar wormy apple pie, but he seemed happy.

And after Mr. Malone . . . Dr. Carl Sagan.

I don't have to describe him, do I? No.

I have seen a lot of people only across auditoriums: Claude Shannon, Gerald O'Neill, Robert Heinlein, Sir Fred Hoyle . . . I had seen Carl Sagan any number of times through phosphorescent glass—hell, that's what I was here *now* for. But we undervalue—and television helps in this—the magic quality of real perception, as when I first saw the Unicorn Tapestries, which I knew in detail from books but had not *seen* at all.

TV and oil people, forget it. Without naming names, Dr. Sagan mentioned some of the people who made the audience distinguished:

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astronomers, physicists, NASA administrators, the new president of the American University, the discoverer of Pluto's moon Charon . . . I'd been feeling seedy. Now I was a seedy alien.

However, here was Carl Sagan welcoming all of us, friends, colleagues, and aliens. So I made a mental note of where I'd parked the saucer and settled back as the lights went down.

And the galaxies came out . . .

We all filed across the corridor to the reception hall. There were three bars and three busy barmen; canapés and cold meats and stuffed olives in profusion; a whole roast turkey flew past on a waiter's shoulder. In one corner, an aproned fellow with tattooed arms and a heavy glove busily shucked oysters. Waiters in black tie circulated with silver trays, removing empty glasses and oyster shells. Does the National Academy of Sciences keep Epicurus on retainer? Oh, yes, we're guests of Atlantic Richfield. There ain't no such thing as a free hors d'oeuvre.

But never mind the spread below. The room has a double-vaulted ceiling with elaborate gold-leafed paintings illustrating the sciences. Over the door is a quote and illustration from *Prometheus Bound*. There's a choir loft, for Heaven's sake. And in the dead center of the cross-shaped room a Foucault pendulum is swinging, swinging, proving the Earth does move. Altogether quite a place. I forgive them the zodiacal signs in wrought iron.

I was wearing my Science Fiction Writers of America badge, and every now and then someone would ask what SFWA stood for. When told, they would either engage me in interested if puzzled conversation or wander away. That's why I wore the thing . . . it establishes right up front what the other person thinks of your profession. (So you'll know: the national average is Not Very Much.) I'm sure no one would have wandered off had I been Arthur C. Clarke, but then aside from little things like communications satellites and fifty-plus books Arthur C. Clarke has been on television.

Being seedy and undistinguished (not to mention short) does teach you one thing: how to listen to the unseedy, distinguished people's conversations. So I heard one of the NASA people asked if the Shuttle orbiter could pace the Spaceship of the Imagination. And the fellow who announced that he'd never even heard of the Alexandrian Library. And there was the man who told me directly that the show might really hold the young audience, but he'd fallen asleep halfway through. (I don't know what he was, and I don't care to know. I do hope he wasn't from NASA.) And every time I got near Dr. Sagan

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someone would pop a strobe in my eyes, and when they cleared he would be a quarter of the way across the room. We were describing a Ptolemaic epicycle, so to speak.

Not that I had the damndest notion of what I would say if I caught up with him. That I liked the show? Distinguished people (pardon me for wearing this phrase out, but it got heavy use that evening) were already saying that. That I liked *him?* The trouble with that, as every writer knows, is that "I'm your fan" leaves no further avenue of discussion, or even response beyond "Gee, thanks." Might I say that one of my best-received stories was inspired by an essay from *The Cosmic Connection?* Possibly. But he probably hadn't read the story, and besides, it had nothing to do with the issue of the evening.

Can you meet four hundred people in two hours? Of course you can't. They would get an average of 18 seconds apiece. Even if you already know half of them and spend only half the normal time getting re-acquainted, that's still only 22.5 seconds for the new folks. Had I come 200 miles for 22.5 seconds?

Yes, I had. I'd come for the *possibility* of it. I *knew* I'd see the program, in time if not tonight. But . . . I was stuck to the possibility of meeting Dr. Sagan. I hoped I would have the grace not to force the issue. (This was probably not true. Grace, unhappily, is not my strong suit.)

It was dark gray suits that forced the issue. Half the men there were wearing dark gray suits, hard to distinguish (sorry)—and abruptly I realized who was wearing the suit next to me. . . .

And I said what I wasn't going to say because it sounded so maudlin, so uninspired: that I'd cried that morning for Voyager and again tonight for the rest of the universe.

And he smiled, as he had on screen for the Orion Nebula, shook my hand and thanked me.

Hearing my seconds tick by, I explained my transmission-lag problem with this article and asked what he thought, not of the program, but the evening. He replied that the technical problems—the poor focus and interference on the big screen—had kept him on edge. I said I understood the feeling—and I do; it's the feeling you get whenever a typo sneaks into print—and that it didn't matter to me; and he thanked me for that.

And then my time ran out, until at the end of the evening I stole a bit more. (Which was not gracious—and I apologize in public.)

The fuzzy focus, the scan lines—I didn't mention them, did I? Because you didn't see them, when you saw *Cosmos*. Because this

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is my memoir of the evening, I've told you about the engineers and the canapés and the auditorium (so like the Spaceship of the Imagination, now that I recall it). But I do not mean to overlay my memory of the program on yours. If you cried, or if you didn't, that was your experience, not mine.

Here we are, then, at the reason this is a personal voyage: Because more than it was about science, *Cosmos* is about the *experience* of science—of the luminous joy that radiates from discovery. A novel of mine offered the case that love is nothing *but* learning; and if I do not believe that unreservedly I do believe it.

A reviewer (and this isn't a review, remember) said that he could have done with fewer shots of Dr. Sagan marveling at the wonders of the universe. But those cutaways—what the trade calls *reaction shots*—were in a very real sense the whole point: not science-as-lecture but science as a thing which affects people, which just so happens to be what we SF writers claim to write about. The Spaceship of the Imagination, which some critics found peculiar in design (presumably because it was not built from model-tank parts and carried no cute robots as supercargo) seems to me a perfect creation, without a scrap of DC-3 or White Freightliner to intrude on whatever we might conceive as its mechanism; I wish it were mine to set stories in.

A lot of points were made about *Cosmos:* that it was American-made (as if that had anything to do with anything); that Ballantine Books published a tie-in calendar (would that they had published the Cosmic Calendar instead of a mere A.D. 1981!); that it made one scruffy SF writer cry a little bit.

All of these are side issues—even that it will be seen by 150 million people; that many people see an Italian Western or kung-fu kickfest. Everyone sees the sun come up, but few learn about hydrogen fusion, the ecliptic plane, and the Hertzsprung-Russell diagram.

Carl Sagan is the J.B.S. Haldane of our times (and if you know Haldane not, waste no time listening to me; go thou and read), doing science to light up the darkness, and writing essays on paper and videotape that light up darkened minds. (No, I have not forgotten Dr. Asimov, Dr. Clarke, Dr. Thomas, and the others, nor Drs. Haldane and Eiseley. If you are not moved by the sight of Saturn coming into sunlight, then will you rejoice for the incredible wealth of thought surrounding us?)

I will review *Cosmos* after all. I heard people asking who the fourth-century mathematician Hypatia had been, and where they

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could learn more about her; and I heard the man who had known nothing of the Library of Alexandria, and now wished he had a borrower's card.

Here's my review: Look! Can you see the lights coming on?

HAIKU FOR THE SPACE TELESCOPE

There clarity sings,
Where Earth joins orbital hands,
Our vision takes wings.

—by Robert Frazier

SOLUTION TO THE JOLLY GREEN DIGITS (from page 51)

"We are arranged," said Zero, "so our names are in alphabetical order. Of course that's a joke, and I wouldn't blame your readers for being annoyed. So here's a serious problem. It's never been published."

All the digits left the center of the room except two who stood solemnly side by side. "That," said Zero, "is the smallest number with the following interesting property. Every digit from 1 through 9 is in a divisor of the number. Divisors include 1 and the number itself."

Can you determine the number? See page 88 if you can't.

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THROUGH TIME & SPACE WITH FERDINAND FEGHOOT !X!

by Grendel Briarton art: Tim Kirk

The present numbering scheme (!!!, V!, etc.) applies only to the Feghoots appearing in these pages; the total number of these things, including those published elsewhere, is far larger.

In 1908, shortly before the death of the formidable Empress Dowager, Tzu Hsi, Ferdinand Feghoot sentimentally tried to save her doomed Chinese Empire. (He had ruled as the Emperor Fei Hu, 357–329 B.C.) Though she paid no heed to his counsels, his mission was by no means an absolute failure. He did save the life of her Master Chef, venerable Mao Shih-pen.

A young lion had escaped from the zoo, and the Empress decreed that when it was cornered and shot it would be the *pièce de resistance* at a most splendid banquet. The top mandarins were invited, and the whole diplomatic corps. After any number of delicate dishes were served, finally in came Mao's masterpiece.

Everyone set to eagerly—and there was sudden dead silence. The dish tasted awful. The French ambassador actually spat his first bite into his napkin.

The furious Empress had Mao dragged before her. "Such insulting incompetence," she screamed, "must be punished!" And she sentenced him to suffer the death of a thousand cuts.

Instantly, Feghoot threw himself at her feet. "Be merciful, Heavenborn!" he cried out. "Master Mao wasn't responsible. Your political enemies have been spiking his tea with straight alcohol! He was drunk without knowing it!"

"How do you know this?" she demanded.

"It was obvious," replied Ferdinand Feghoot. "The poor old man couldn't even wok a strayed lion."

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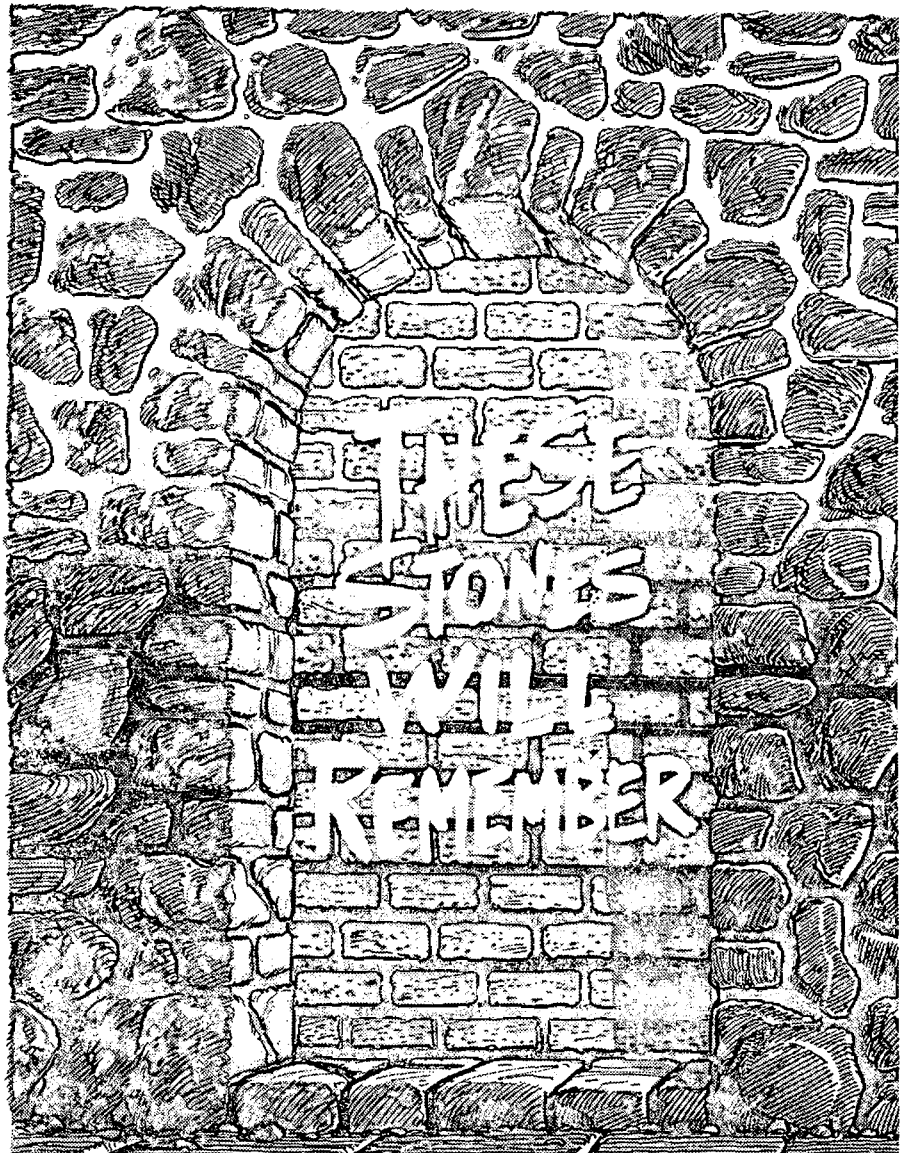

Story by Reginald Bretnor

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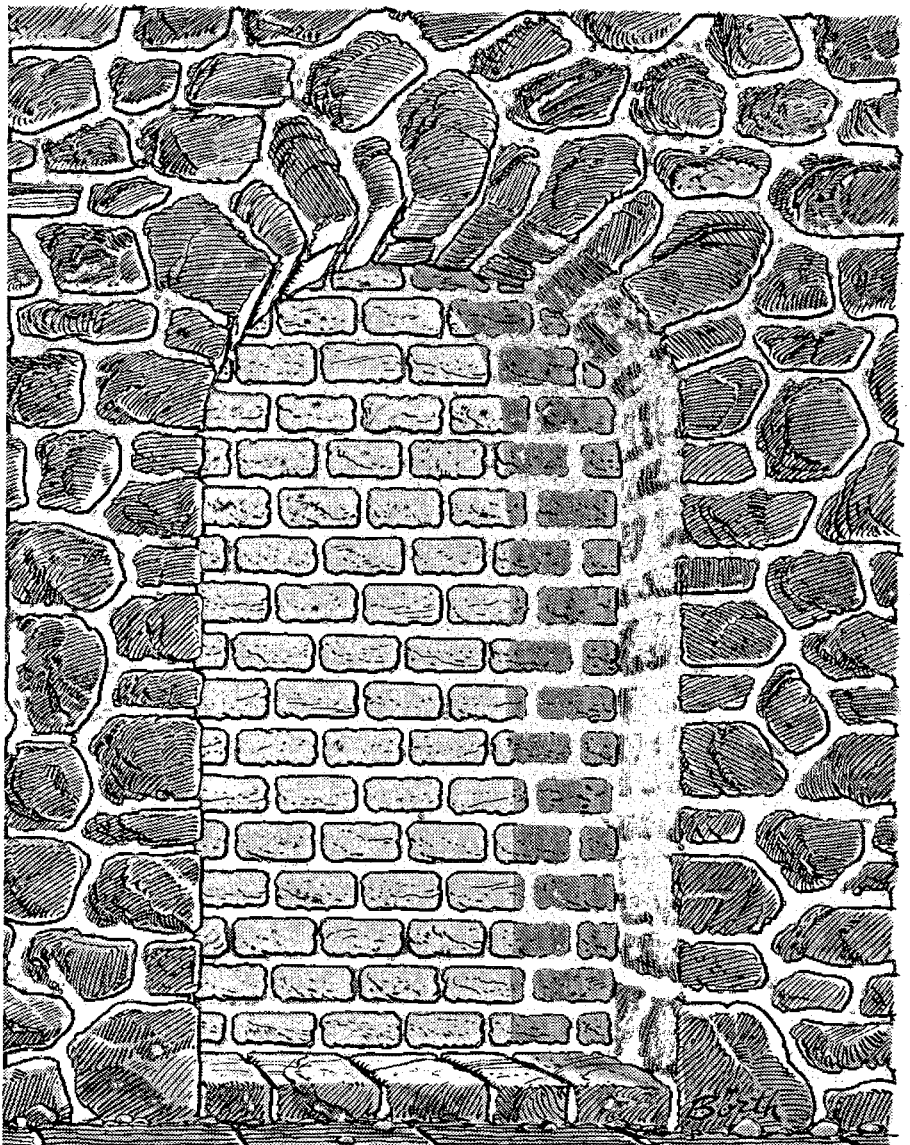

Art: Frank Borth

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Mr. Bretnor tells us that he was born in 1911—in Vladivostok, Siberia—and came to the United States, after four years in Japan, in 1920, all of which—he fears—dates him somewhat. For some years, during and after the war (WWII, that is), he wrote propaganda for the Office of War Information and the Department of State's OIICA, mostly for Japan and the Far East. He sold his first story—SF—to Harper's *and has been freelancing ever since. For the past ten years, he has lived in southern Oregon with his wife Rosalie, herself a writer (though not of SF). Projects include a three-volume anthology,* The Future at War; *a sequel to his mystery novel* A Killing in Swords; *and an SF novel.*

This is my confession. I have killed Ignatiev. I have killed Academician Andrei Konstantinovitch Ignatiev, the century's foremost genius, the universal scientist, the unique mind that triumphed in half a dozen disciplines, some of them totally unrelated. That is what *Pravda* and other party organs always said about him, and they did not exaggerate. He was a theoretical physicist, a Nobel laureate. He was a physical chemist, again a Nobel laureate. He was the recipient of how many Lenin Prizes? How many decorations?

It is all true. It is also true that he was a Member of the Central Committee of the Party. He was not just a creature of the men inside the Kremlin—he was one of them. He was also an egomaniac: totally self-centered, completely self-assured, utterly ruthless. Physically, he was immensely strong, with the shoulders of a bull and the huge, round, bald head of a Turkish wrestler. And he was cruel. His colleagues feared him. His women first believed they loved him, then invariably discovered that they loathed and hated him.

He was also the man whose influence freed me after I had spent eleven years in prison.

I met him first many years ago, when we were both at the University, where we had friends in common—a professor of mathematics, his wife, and his daughter, Evgenia, a very quiet, gentle girl

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whom I had hoped to marry. Always he made fun of me, of my long, thin frame, my pale thin hair, and he would make crude jokes about my specialty, about the ancient languages I loved. "Our Fredichka," he'd say, "will soon announce the most important of discoveries—that there are eighty-seven words in Old Minoan referring to a woman's private parts. Imagine it! He has written a five-hundred-page dissertation of the subject."

I would turn red, and he would simply roar with laughter. My name is Frederic—my father, a musician, named me after Chopin, whom he loved—but no one had called me Fredichka since childhood. Ignatiev did, and the way he did it robbed me of any dignity I might have had. Much of my life then was given to my poetry, and he mocked even that, reciting unkind parodies in a falsetto imitation of my voice. For a long time, I put up with it, for Evgenia's and her parents' sake. Then I became aware that she and Ignatiev were lovers, and I withdrew as unobtrusively as possible, somehow sensing that the affair, for her, would end in bitterness, in her hating and despising him—and herself even more. I withdrew into my languages, into my poetry, into the company of other language scholars and other poets. Eventually I obtained a position at the Institute for Ancient Languages, teaching, doing research, writing monographs.

It was a good life, and my career, though quiet, was not undistinguished. There were no Nobel Prizes for me, no glittering honors, but enough recognition so that I felt established, necessary. Unfortunately, too, there was enough to arouse jealousy among a few over whose heads I was promoted; and I had been indiscreet enough, and had felt secure enough, to associate too carelessly with poets who were dissidents, and to publish poems of my own crying out against political injustices. I never did learn who denounced me, but one night, after eight and a half years, they came for me.

If you have read Solzhenitsyn, you are familiar with what followed: Lubyanka Prison, the cells, the questionings—the endless questionings, the subtle tortures of the mind and body—and then the mockery of a trial, and the cold, locked, closely guarded van to Dvershinsk Barracks. There I spent those eleven years. It was a prison for scientists and scholars, very much like the one in *The First Circle*. We worked interminably, given the minimum of food, of warmth, of clothing needed to keep us working. Often I wondered whose learned papers I was writing, what influential Party academic's translations I was toiling over. But at least I was able to study, learn, and maintain my linguistic skills, and to scribble

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poetry too, for my fellow prisoners and sometimes even for the guards.

When I was summoned, it was the dead of winter, and once again it was at night. I had just fallen asleep in my cold, hard bed when I was awakened by hands shaking me. A guard I did not know looked at the paper in his hand by flashlight.

"Kolpakov?" he said. "Frederic Platonovitch Kolpakov?"

I admitted my identity.

"Get up and dress," he ordered. "You are to leave this place."

"To leave?" I exclaimed. "Wh-what do they want of me?"

"They didn't tell me," he growled. "Get your clothes on. You'll need nothing else."

I rose and dressed, conscious that my companions had awakened, feeling their fear echoing my own. As I walked out with the guard, some of them whispered goodbye to me, wishing me good luck.

The guard walked me through the icy hallways to the office of the prison commandant, a heavy man with agate eyes and a deceptive joviality. I asked him politely where they were taking me, and he replied with a barking laugh. "Why, I can't tell you *that!* Everything's going to be a big surprise!" He slapped me on the back. "Maybe they'll take you to the Moscow zoo and feed you to the lions, ha-ha-ha!"

They gave me underwear and socks and shoes, a shirt, a tie, an ill-fitting civilian suit, a badly worn but heavy overcoat. They put a shabby suitcase in my hands. I signed several documents.

Then I and the unknown guard went out into the night. There I encountered my first surprise. No black, shrouded van awaited me. Instead, the guard walked me to an enormous limousine, its engine purring smoothly, a cloud of steam coming from its exhaust. He opened the back door.

"Get in," he ordered.

As the door swung open, the light went on inside. I looked. I stared. Ignatiev was sitting there.

He had scarcely changed. His features had matured. His head and shoulders appeared even more massive than before. I was, of course, familiar with his career, with the achievements and the fame that had, I knew, taken him far, far away from such narrow, unkind worlds as mine.

"Come, Fredichka," he said, all the old contempt still in his voice, "get in the pretty car. You and I are going for a ride."

"A-Andrei Konstantinovitch!" I stammered.

"Good, you remember me. Get in, get in!"

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I eased myself down into the luxury of the seat, gripped the miserable suitcase between my trembling knees. The door was closed behind me. We began to move. As we drove out of the courtyard and through the surrounding rings of fences, I saw the guards we passed saluting. I was in shock. I could not imagine why I had been freed. I did not know whether I really *had* been freed. I was astounded at the identity of my deliverer. But I was out of prison. No walls confined me. There were no guards—at least none I could identify. Through the car's window, I saw the winter stars, bright in the frozen sky. Tears ran down my cheeks. I could not speak.

"You are wondering why I secured your release?" he said then. "You are wondering why I, Ignatiev, have taken my old friend Fredichka out of his prison? Well, I'll tell you this much—it is because I need your languages. The rest you will learn later. For the moment, please remember that you are not yet fully free, that the authorities released you to work for *me*."

I shook my head. Why would Ignatiev, of all people, need my languages? I mumbled, trying to tell him of my gratitude.

He dismissed the effort with a gesture. "Before we finish"—he leaned toward me, and suddenly the contempt left his voice—"you will have earned your pay. Also, I promise you there will be many crumbs of fame from the cake I'll cut. But first there will be work for both of us. Tomorrow I will tell you more, and also we will have to feed you better than they have, and get you clothing to replace those rags, and have a proper doctor look at you."

There were several more miles to go before we reached his *dacha,* his villa far out in Moscow's suburbs, and during the drive he asked me questions: about the prison, about the work they'd had me doing there—with which he was surprisingly familiar. I answered him as fully as I could, apologizing because events had been too much for me; and then he began talking about people we had known long ago, telling me who had died, who had been promoted or disgraced, who had published what. It was all new to me. In prison I had heard almost nothing. But he never mentioned Evgenia or her parents, and I was thankful for that. Indeed, I had never seen him so warm and human; nor was I ever to again.

It was nearly midnight when we reached the *dacha,* a rambling wooden building more than a century old, built originally for some long-forgotten nobleman or wealthy merchant. Wonderingly, I walked into its warmth, its light and shadow, stepping on its Oriental carpets, gazing at huge tiled stoves, bronzes, paintings, ancient

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icons, antique furniture, a silver samovar lording it over lesser silver and silver-gilt from the great workshops of the Czarist past. Despite the hour, his housekeeper, a tall, handsome woman who I learned later also was his mistress, first brought us brandy—*brandy,* I could not believe it!—then took us in to supper, served by a buxom servant girl. I realized that I had not eaten a really decent meal since my imprisonment.

For the moment, my apprehension vanished. I ate and drank for the first time in eleven years. Ignatiev also ate, talking occasionally and watching me with the familiar expression of half-amused contempt, but all my attention was focussed on that meal. I, who had grown to think that I had disciplined myself beyond such things, realized suddenly how hungry I had been. Finally, when we had finished, my suspicions of him, my dislike—yes, my hatred of him—all were dulled. Gratitude comes easily to the half-starved and newly freed.

He and the woman took me to a bedroom next to what must once have been the nursery, a nurse's or a governess's, small, bare, but—*Bozhe moi!*—with its own washbasin and toilet, all new. The bed was made. It had already been turned down. I sat down on it, smoothing the pillow unbelievingly.

The woman left, but Ignatiev lingered for a moment. "Sleep well, Fredichka," he said. "There'll be no guards to wake you, no snores, no sicknesses." He laughed. "And you can turn the light on and off when you want to. But before I leave you, I must tell you something. I am starting on a new career. I am going to be the world's most famous archaeologist. I, Ignatiev, will tear out the best protected secrets of the past, and you shall help me. *Spokoynoi noch."*

His words echoed dully in my head, only half understood. I too mumbled a goodnight, and with that he left me. Still dazed, I undressed, got into bed—and could not sleep at first because of the luxurious privacy, the silence. Then twice I woke, thinking I was still in prison, dreaming. Then I slept beautifully till amost nine, when the woman, Marfa, came to wake me.

I did not see him until much later in the day. Instead, a man whom I took to be his driver-bodyguard drove me in the big limousine to several of the best shops in Moscow, where ordinary people could not buy, and bought me clothing, shoes, everything I possibly might need. He drove with a minimum of conversation, telling me coldly and courteously that this was what Ignatiev wanted done. He bought our lunch in a good restaurant. Then we went to a clinic where a hard-faced elderly doctor checked me over: blood-tests, X-

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rays, specimens, cardiograms, even an electroencephalograph. I could tell that she knew at a glance where I had spent my years, but neither she nor I made any comment.

It was five in the afternoon when we returned, and Marfa showed me to his library, where he was waiting for me, looking strangely out of place among fringed and beaded lamps, looming bookcases, and a bronze bust of Pushkin. Here too, his passion for collecting was evident. On his desk stood a lovely silver *kovsh,* glowing with plique-à-jour enamel, and other precious objects were everywhere. Marfa closed the door behind her. He waved me to a chair.

I looked at the expensive suit I now was wearing. "You—you have been very kind to me, Andrei Konstantinovitch. I—I want you to know—"

He cut me off. "If you are going to work for me—and I assure you that you're going to work *hard* for me—we can't have your clothes stinking of a prison, and we must keep you healthy so that you *can* work."

He looked down at a pile of monographs on his desk. "Are you familiar with Professor Rivokhin's recent work in linguistics and philology?"

I shook my head.

"You ought to be," he said. "You did most of it, and it was all based on certain basic premises you suggested in a paper before they hauled you off."

I thought of all the work I had done over the years—and of the journals I had *not* received. "You—you mean that this Rivokhin—that he has simply taken credit for everything I've done? That he has added nothing to it?"

"Nothing," said Ignatiev. He laughed, contemptuously again. "Fredichka, Rivokhin is eminent, an Academician like myself, like myself a ranking Party Member. *You* have never understood the importance of belonging to the aristocracy—especially one that is secure because it calls itself servant instead of master. Solzhenitsyn recognized us for what we are, we of the new class, but few others have. So your work has become old Rivokhin's; all he has done is to change a few words and lengthen a few sentences. He does not even understand what you were aiming at"—he leaned forward, his vast shoulders shadowing the desk—"the scientific rebuilding of ancient languages, even of lost tongues, from their surviving remnants, the reconstitution of their words, their grammars, of their exact sounds. Tell me, am I right?"

I was astounded at his knowledge, at his insight. Here was the

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goal I had cherished in my mind, the goal I had never dared to formulate so clearly even to myself. My expression told him everything; I did not need to answer him.

"There! We understand each other—except that you never looked ahead as far as this. You never thought of marrying your theories to computer technology, did you, Fredichka? No? Well, neither has Rivokhin." Again he burst out laughing. "A poet in prison and a thieving intellectual dunderhead! Well, *I* have thought of it, and that is what we're going to do, you and I. I will show you how to state your theories so that computers can handle them and test them. I am not worried about the outcome; I am already certain that basically they are completely valid. Can you see how this will revolutionize archaeology, this perfect knowledge of the ancient tongues?" He threw his head back. He hammered on his desk. "The discoveries of Schliemann, of Sir Aurel Stein, of Howard Carter and Carnarvon, of all the rest, will seem like nothing! I shall unearth the tomb of Alexander! I shall discover Atlantis underneath the sea! All the great mysteries of the past will open to Ignatiev!"

Now I too was excited, not at the thought of all these triumphs—which frankly I considered improbable because even a complete and perfect knowledge of a dead tongue would be of little use unless written records could be found to work from—but at the undreamed-of prospect of realizing my own unvoiced dream. I did not even think of what my fate might be once his computers had learned all I knew.

"Th-that would be *magnificent!*" I whispered.

He rang the bell, and the servant girl came with glasses and two decanters. This time, we drank vodka, and we drank until Marfa called us in to dinner. He drank three times as much as I, and all through the meal he talked—first about the details of my work and the computer specialist with whom I would be working, then about the great things he was going to accomplish. He talked of Asian burial mounds with their golden treasures, of the vast hoard of gold the Incas hid from the greed of their Spanish conquerors.

"Yes, Fredichka," he told me, "I have invented a device. The principle is entirely new—only I could even have conceived of it! Did you know that under our own Kremlin there are miles of forgotten passages, of sealed chambers unopened for four hundred years? Did you know that somewhere there lies the lost library of Ivan Grozni—eight hundred precious manuscripts, many of them the heritage of Sophia Paleologus, niece of the last Emperor of Byzantium, who married Ivan the Great, his grandfather? That there is

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reputed to be a complete Greek manuscript of Homer there? I will find that library!" He laughed his roaring laugh, rocking in his chair. He was drunk now, and drinking his after-dinner brandy, but there was no thickness in his voice, and his eyes were as shrewd and cold as they had ever been. "Not even the ghost of the Terrible Ivan can guard his library when I get after it!" he shouted; and laughter burst from him anew.

I rose, a bit unsteadily. I explained that I had a lot of reading to catch up on before tomorrow's working session. I asked to be excused.

"You never could drink, could you?" he remarked. "Well, it does not matter. Get back there to your books and bed."

But at the door he called to me. I halted, turned. "Do you believe in ghosts, Fredichka?" he asked.

Even jokingly, one would not admit such a belief to a Member of the Central Committee of the Party. "Certainly not, Andrei Konstantinovitch," I answered.

Contemptuously, he looked me up and down. "You should," he said; and his laugh was so intense that it was almost threatening. "You should believe in them. All Russia's haunted. The Kremlin, the Red Square, are haunted by thousands who've been tortured, who've screamed for mercy, who've been slaughtered there. This *dacha's* haunted—and you will see its ghost. Sleep soundly, Fredichka."

I chuckled rather weakly, and said goodnight, but as I went down the corridor, hastened on my way by that enormous laughter, I felt a chill—was it merely of superstition?—descend on me.

For four months, I lived there with Ignatiev. On the third day, after the reports from my physical examination had come in, he introduced me to the computer expert, a small, neat, pleasant man with silver spectacles. His name was Artiemko, and he was interested only in his computers and in chess. He was an easy man to get along with, and as Ignatiev had installed him in a room not far from mine, he was almost always available. I had no difficulty explaining how my theory operated, and how, unlike most theories in philology, it applied not just to certain groups of languages, but to all except possibly the most primitive; and he, on his part, took a genuine interest, explaining just as patiently how that theory could be exploited by his instruments. We worked all day, every day, usually at Ignatiev's house, but sometimes at an Institute laboratory, where Artiemko was regularly employed. Sometimes, too, I would get Ignatiev's permission to use the libraries, when I needed

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references which could not readily be brought to me.

I had always taken pleasure in my work; and now new horizons had opened to me. I enjoyed my days. Sometimes, after supper, when Ignatiev was not home—and that was usually five evenings out of seven—I would play chess either with Artiemko or with Marfa, or we would watch the television together. She was kind to me—as kind, I think, as she dared to be. She never talked about Ignatiev. It was obvious that she loved him. It was equally obvious that she was desperately unhappy; several times, in the morning, I surprised her weeping. But if I needed anything, I only had to ask her. If I felt unwell, she brought me broth or gave me medicines. Then, when I had trouble sleeping after Ignatiev had been drinking, when lying in bed I could still hear his laughter sounding in my ears, she gave me the sleeping pills a doctor had prescribed for her. She gave me the whole bottle, warning me that they were very strong, and saying that she herself had never needed them. I wonder now what will become of her.

Actually, my insomnia did not last for long. I realized that, in order to get all my work done, in order to survive, I would have to sleep naturally and not rely on opiates. Alone in my room at night, I realized that I did not even fully understand the situation I was in. Prison, no matter how unpleasant, had been predictable. Ignatiev, I knew, was not. I would lie there wondering what his intentions really were toward me, whether he would send me back to prison after he had sucked me dry, or whether, alive even in prison, I might not be a danger to his new reputation. And there were nights when I lay there half-waking and half-sleeping, imagining—or was I imagining?—strange sounds within the walls, and subtle movements of the air.

Finally, before even half a dozen of the sleeping pills were gone, I remembered how I had taught myself to sleep in prison. I have always had an almost perfect memory for poetry, and so I recited Pushkin to myself, and Lermontov, and my own poetry and my friends', and endless passages of Byron, and in my mind's eye I played entire scenes from Racine and Molière. The library in my mind was instantly accessible, not hidden underground like Ivan Grozni's.

The weeks and months went by, and we made progress. At that stage, we were working in two basic linguistic areas, the Slavonic and the Greek; and now we first found that computer-evolved words—words reproduced as they would have been a few hundred, a few thousand years previously—were valid. When I checked them

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against old documents and antique inscriptions—Slavonic writings a few hundred years old, Greek going back two or three thousand years—they corresponded. First there were individual words, then entire phrases. I became more and more excited. So did Ignatiev. He would drink and boast, and talk about his risen ghosts, and—as always—laugh at my discomfiture.

During the second month, he ordered me to concentrate on the Slavonic tongues, especially on Russian. That, he told me, was where our results would be most immediate and dramatic. "We are here," he said, "in the midst of all our Russian-speaking ghosts, are we not, Fredichka? We must make the best of our opportunity."

As the fourth month drew to a close, Artiemko announced that his own work was done, that he would have to go back to his job at the laboratory. He promised to return from time to time and play chess with me, and I was genuinely sorry to see him go.

That night, Ignatiev came in as we were finishing supper, already more than slightly drunk, and he surprised me by his silence. He sat down with us, poured himself a glass of wine, and asked me seriously and politely whether I could now understand the Russian, perhaps even dialects of Russian, of four or five hundred years ago.

I told him I was sure I could, if only the writing was clear and well-formed enough.

"And what if it weren't written, Fredichka?" he asked. "What if it were spoken?"

"According to my theory, the computers have given us the sounds exactly as they were, Andrei Konstantinovitch," I answered, smiling. "If it were possible to hear them, I should be able to understand them perfectly."

"Good, good," he said. "Well, soon we shall see." He poured himself more wine; he poured a glass for Marfa. I looked at her. She smiled very slightly, and nodded at the door. I realized that now he wanted to be alone with her, and said goodnight to them.

For perhaps two hours, I sat up in bed, reading a novel of Jack London's, losing myself among the snows and wild beasts and rough prospectors of the Alaskan wilderness, among dangers and discomforts other than my own. Then I turned out my light and fell asleep.

It was two o'clock when I awakened—or rather when I *was* awakened. I listened, my eyes still closed. The sound was with me in my room. It was the sound of a woman weeping bitterly, and my first thought was that something terrible must have happened, that Ignatiev must have done something unspeakable to Marfa.

Naturally, my impulse was to comfort her, perhaps to help her if

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I could. I turned my head and looked.

There was a woman in my room. But she was not Marfa. She was someone I had never seen before, a small, pretty woman in a long gray dress of watered silk, cut in the fashion of the mid-19th century. Her hair was golden. She wore a golden chain, a large locket, and an enamelled brooch. She was walking very slowly across the room, crying desperately, wringing a hankerchief between her anguished hands. She was perfectly visible, surrounded by an almost phosphorescent glow, and as she passed my bed a chill emanated from her, a coldness that penetrated to my blood and bones.

I could not speak, and she did not look at me. Behind her was the nursery door, from which she must have come, though it was locked. For an instant, I wondered if somehow Ignatiev was playing a ghastly joke on me. Then, her back turned, she was at the door into the hall. Then she had walked through its thick wooden panels, and was gone. The room was dark again.

I turned the light on hastily. I remembered all that Ignatiev had said about the ghosts of Russia, the Kremlin's ghosts and the Red Square's, and the *dacha's*.

That night I did not sleep again.

There are happenings one cannot accept immediately, happenings one is compelled to wrestle with. The mind strives against accepting or rejecting them; reason and all one has been taught war with the experience of one's senses. So it was with me. I never had believed in ghosts; on the other hand, I never dogmatically had disbelieved in them. What had I seen? She had been so real, so pitiful. I had of course heard of holograms, but only in laboratories; still experimental, could they be produced on such a scale? With Ignatiev you never knew—yet would even he have gone to such extremes merely to frighten me? Besides, there had been that sudden, penetrating cold, a phenomenon always associated with the returning dead. I sat there, arguing all these matters with myself and settling none of them, till daylight, when I took refuge in the simplicities of washing, shaving, getting dressed.

When Marfa called me in to breakfast, I was decidedly the worse for wear. She noticed it and questioned me. I told her I had had a nightmare, had been unable to get back to sleep, that it had been too late for me to take a pill.

Ignatiev already had gone out. I spent the morning and part of the afternoon trying to do some work, but without success; finally I gave up and, for an hour or two, napped uneasily.

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It was Ignatiev who woke me, shaking me by the shoulder. "Well, well, Fredichka," he chuckled, "you look very pale today."

I sat up, rubbing my eyes, saying nothing.

He looked down, looming over me. "If you weren't so practical a man"—he laughed aloud—"I'd swear you'd seen a ghost. But then, I told you that this *dacha's* haunted, didn't I? Well, whose ghost did you see?"

Haltingly, not wanting to, I told him, explaining that I knew it was either a hallucination or something he had scientifically contrived.

"My clever Fredichka," he said, "to be so determined a materialist!" He shook his head. "But I assure you that she was neither a figment nor a hologram. She was the Baroness Elizaveta Petrovna Kurbskaya, the wife of Baron Kurbsky—an ancient name—an officer in the fashionable Preobrazhenski Regiment. Tidy little piece, wasn't she? You saw her weeping because her first child had just died. She herself died about fifty years later, in 1897, after she had borne four more children and lost her husband in a duel. He was an immensely interesting fellow. In a little while, after we have a drink or two, which"—his laughter roared out again—"I suspect you really need, I'll introduce you to him."

I shuddered.

"Don't worry," he told me. "The introduction will be quite one-sided, like your meeting with the baroness. Come along, now."

I went with him into the library. Everything was the same as when I had first entered it, except that the blinds were drawn, a light was on, and there was an object on his desk I had not seen before. It looked like an attache case, but bigger and wider than they usually are.

He poured vodka, raised his glass. "To our ghosts!" he said, and drank, and filled his glass again. Then he seated himself behind the desk, gesturing at the chair next to him. I sat down obediently, wondering if I were really sane.

"Now," he declared, "now, Fredichka, I will explain. Last night I arranged for you to meet the little baroness because I wanted you to have no doubts about the reality and importance of what I have discovered. My ghosts are real. But never fear—they are not the returning spirits of the dead. The dead do not return." He waved his hand, taking in the entire room, and now the intensity was returning to his voice. "Look at these walls, that ceiling, the clock, the carpet, this desk. Everything looks so permanent. Who would think that all of it, and we ourselves, are nothing more than displays

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of energy. You know something of physics—I surely don't need to explain atoms to you. Everything is *process;* there is no true *stasis,* only vast energies bound temporarily—always temporarily—conveying the impression of things static, durable, everlasting. Galaxies and suns, dead airless moons, sunflowers and lovely naked girls—all are only appearances. They do not show the underlying matrices of bound and binding energies. And Fredichka"—he rose and began pacing back and forth—"these matrices are much more complex than anyone imagines. They operate on many levels. And nothing—no process in the Universe—is isolated. All influence each other, especially those forces generated by our minds. On the gross, material level, every step taken, every word spoken, each blow one strikes, each moment of every life on earth makes subtle changes in the matrices. Everything—*everything* is recorded."

He stopped in front of me. Again he filled my glass. "You understand?"

"I—I think I do."

"Very well. Long ago, I became interested in ghosts. Some were too well attested to to be illusions. This was true especially in certain countries, in England, Scotland, Ireland. Do you realize that in London's Drury Lane Theatre there walks the ghost of a young man in 18th century costume who has been seen literally by thousands? That in the city of York, Roman soldiers have been seen marching through a wall on a no-longer-existent road? That in the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey the chants of long-dead monks can, quite indisputably, be heard at night? I began to study these phenomena, and before long I realized that something had evoked them from the matrices in which they were recorded. I studied their geophysical environments: the underlying geologies, the prevailing force-fields, the seasons of the year, the weather, everything—even the temper of the people. It took me years, Fredichka—I had other work to do. Then suddenly I found the key. I knew the forces that were invariably involved. I knew how to produce them, much more efficiently than nature ever had."

He pointed at the attache case. "There is my key. We will begin with Holy Russia's bloody past; it is so close at hand. You have met the baroness, and you will meet her husband, so that when we go further back you will not be afraid. You will know that the dead do not threaten us. I now can tune to any century, any day, but I still can evoke clearly only episodes where the emotional vectors were incredibly intense. The rest comes later—a simple matter of technology. It is not yet time to announce what I have found. My proof

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must be dramatic, indisputable, so I have told no one—not even Marfa—except you. I have published nothing; I have put nothing down in writing. When I do publish, no one must be able to deny my findings, or steal the credit from me. Make no mistake, even here in our Socialist Fatherland there are men who steal from the minds of other men." He showed his teeth. "But I believe you know all that. Come, drink up!"

I drank. He filled my glass again. He refilled his own.

"B-but, Andrei Konstantinovitch," I asked. "How did you ever manage to have it made? How could you even get the parts? Without—that is—"

"Without anybody finding out? You are thinking like a prisoner, Fredichka. Remember, I *am* one of the authorities. I did not *have* it made. You have heard of Nicola Tesla? He invented everything up here." He touched a finger to his forehead. "When he designed the first alternating current motor, he built it in his head. He was out walking with a friend, and suddenly he pointed at the empty air. 'See!' he cried out. 'See, *it runs!*' That was how I built my device, and then it simply was a matter of getting a few parts from someone here, from someone there, from colleagues working in space vehicle research and even in more secret fields. All that was necessary was to assemble them, and that I did myself."

He opened up the attache case. Its front hinged downwards, revealing dials, knobs, electronic displays in long rows. He pressed a switch. The device came to life. Four lines of tiny lights began to wink at varying rates across the board.

"It scans the matrices," Ignatiev told me. "It scans the centuries slowly, to miss nothing, the months more rapidly, the days to the precise minute, the exact second. Come over here and look. See, it is going back: the display reads 1910, now 1909 and 1908. See, February the 28th, 27th, 26th. And those dancing blood-red lines on the tube—they tell us when something is happening in this room. Much that occurred was not charged emotionally; as I said, I can't yet pick that material up too clearly. But eventually, Fredichka, I will."

I watched as the months and years rolled back, my mind in turmoil from trying to absorb it all. We turned the corner of the century, and the years, one by one, unrolled before us. The bright red lines danced their swift, erratic dance across the tube. He said nothing more until the display came to 1872. "Now I must slow it down," he told me. "It was an afternoon in May, the 12th, late in the afternoon. At nineteen minutes after four, to be precise. There!" He touched

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a button. His displays read 4:19 P.M., 12 May 1872, but no lights blinked, the face of the tube was still. "We will begin the evocation now," he said, touching a control; and the screen glowed again, and the displays began to count the seconds and the minutes, but in reverse this time.

I thought I heard someone clear his throat; I heard a distinct knock on the door. It was repeated twice. "Fredichka," said Ignatiev, "turn around. You will meet Baron Kurbsky, and you will see that he is very much annoyed."

I turned. The glow I had seen the night before was there, in the room's far corner. There was the shadow of a chair, a chair not there before. And towering over it was a tall man, straight and powerful, red-cheeked, with mutton-chop whiskers and a fierce moustache. He wore a splendid uniform; he wore a sword. In front of him, at strict attention, stood an orderly. The knock came again.

"Open it!" the baron ordered, his deep voice perfectly clear, perfectly distinct, yet somehow apart from us, remote.

The orderly saluted, obeyed.

Two officers entered, wearing the uniform of the same regiment. One of them was short, almost fragile, but with eyes like ice; the other, tall and slightly stooped, had a gentle, almost scholarly look about him, accentuated by his spectacles.

"Good evening, gentlemen," the baron said.

"Good evening, Pavel Pavlovitch," answered the taller of the two.

"You have, I trust, met with Prince Skriavin's seconds?"

"We have, Pavel Pavlovitch. The answer is almost as we had expected. He has accepted. He has, of course, chosen pistols. But he wants to fight at a mere ten yards."

The baron's mouth twisted.

"Look at the tube, Fredichka," said Ignatiev; and I saw that its whole surface was pulsating wildly, fired with a darker red. "That baron was a real man, I tell you—a true Russian! What a temper! See how clear the whole scene is."

"The coward!" Baron Kurbsky growled. "He is afraid to fight me like a soldier, with swords. Well, if he wants pistols he shall have them!"

The taller officer looked troubled. He placed a hand softly on the baron's forearm. "Pavel, Pavel," he said, urgently, "my friend, please consider. The prince is deadly with the pistol. He has killed four good men already. You are married. You have three boys, a girl. Could not we, your seconds, go to him and try to compose the quarrel? It was only over a ballet girl, not any matter of importance."

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"Enough!" shouted the baron. Roughly he flung off his friend's hand. "Serozha, I will not apologize! Never say anything like that to me again! Yes, yes, you are a true friend, I know. So go and meet again with his seconds. Arrange the time and place. Inform me. We will see how deadly this prince is!"

The two officers bowed; they said goodnight; the orderly stood at attention by the door as they filed out. But the door as we knew it remained closed; and I realized that, throughout that hot and angry scene, the deep chill had flowed from all of them toward us, toward me.

Ignatiev switched off his machine. He laughed. "What a fool he was! The prince was just as deadly as they said. The two fought next morning, in a field belonging to another nobleman, and the prince, very cool and quick, wounded him mortally at the first exchange; the baron's ball missed by several inches. His doctors and the baroness nursed him for several painful days, but there was nothing to be done."

He filled our glasses. This time, we drank to the baron and the prince.

"There!" he said. "By now are you convinced that there's no danger to you, no matter what turns up out of the past? That is important—for tomorrow you'll have to have your wits about you. What we evoke where we are going may be far more dreadful than these small domestic scenes I've shown you. Tomorrow we shall scan matrices going back four hundred years, when Ivan Grozni ruled in Muscovy. Your linguistic skills will have to be as sharp as possible, for you will hear the Russian spoken then—and God only knows in what sort of accent. You are quite sure of your ability to understand?"

Still shaken, still oppressed by that strange chill, I said I was, that the computers could be relied upon.

Then it was supper time, and he dropped the subject. We ate hurriedly and in silence, so much so that even Marfa was surprised and puzzled. looking from one to the other of us but not asking questions. I realized that he could hardly wait to get back into the library, his decanters, and his plans.

As soon as we returned, he began drinking again—brandy this time—and getting increasingly excited as he talked.

"Tomorrow, Fredichka," he told me, "I take the first small step. I have a friend in the Department of Antiquities, and they have given me permission to investigate a passage they have found. It's

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in the heart of Moscow, under an old Czarist building damaged in the war and just torn down. A fine new building will be erected on the site, and the plans called for a cellar much deeper than the existing one, so they began digging and found a deeper cellar still, filled in not just with earth but with what was left of a great ancient house that burned and collapsed into it, probably when the Khan of the Crimea and his Tartars burned Moscow in 1571. Ah, *that* was a time, Fredichka! Ivan fled to the far north, leaving Moscow to its fate, and the gates of the defended Kremlin were kept locked against the people while the Tartars looted, raped, and burned. The city was destroyed—yes, there was actually a modern fire-storm, imagine it! But some escaped. There were deep secret tunnels leading from houses in the city, under the Kremlin moat, under the walls. And that, I think, is what they've found. There is a great bronze door, and it was barred from the inside, but they have opened it. It leads into a vaulted passage, and this in turn has curious arched alcoves along each side, any of which could be the bricked-up entrance to a room, for tunnels such as these were not only for escape. Sometimes they themselves served as hiding places, from enemies, from the Czar's wrath, for treasure, who knows? Now the passage has been completely blocked by fallen rubble; it extends only about fifty yards. But I and the Department of Antiquities both want to know what lies along its walls. I told them that if there were any hidden rooms my device would find them. My friend there offered to assist me, but I told him no—that I wanted no one present if it failed to work, that I would bring my own assistant, who wouldn't dare to say, 'I told you so!' "

His laughter rumbled in his throat. "*You* wouldn't, would you, Fredichka?"

I told him truthfully that I would not.

"We will drink to that!" He poured brandy for the two of us. "I can see ways already to make the instrument so sensitive that the emotional vectors will be much less critical. I can see ways to increase the area covered immeasurably. Perhaps we shall raise the ghosts of entire battles! We shall watch as Dmitri Donskoi defeats the Mongols, and see Greeks and Persians fighting to the death at Salamis! We shall see blood flowing in the Roman Coliseum—ah, there will be ghosts *there,* I can tell you!"

He sat there drinking, fondling the silver and enamel *kovsh,* and boasting, more to himself I think than me, of what his instrument would do, and of the fame he'd reap from it. Next time he offered to refill my glass, I begged off, pleading that I would really need a

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clear head tomorrow.

He shrugged disparagingly. "Well, then, go off to bed. But I shall give you one more thought to take with you. My device will not only solve all these ancient problems." He leaned out over the broad desk to stare at me. "It will do much more than that! The past is not all ancient, Fredichka. The past starts *now*. Words spoken and deeds done yesterday, last week, last year will be as readily available as the poor ghosts you've seen. Think what a political instrument *that* will be, eh? There will be *no* more secrets, none at all! Believe me, our friends in power will appreciate what Ignatiev has done for them."

The concept stunned me. I stood there goggling at him while all its terrible implications crowded in.

"It's nothing anyone need be afraid of—unless he has a guilty conscience or guilty knowledge." He smiled cruelly, mirthlessly. "And I'm sure you don't have a guilty conscience, do you, Fredichka?"

I tried to laugh. "After eleven years in prison?"

He did not answer me.

As I left the room, I saw him turning his device on again, to eavesdrop on I know not what resurrected painful scene.

I went back to my bedroom, infinitely more disturbed than I had been since my release. I sat down on the bed and tried to think. But that one thought of the secret police using his device had fallen on me like a pall, bringing with it a chill as penetrating as any that accompanied his spectres. I sat there for two hours and more. Suddenly a useful tool for historical and archaeological and linguistic research had been turned into an instrument of tyranny. It was too terrible a thought to bear.

Ghosts of ideas flitted through my mind. Perhaps I could expostulate with him, convince him that he had forged a two-edged sword. Perhaps I could suggest that when he published, as he was determined to, Western imperialists would also have the weapon. But even as the ideas came to me, I realized how futile they all were. He had no fear of the secret police, of prisons, of concentration camps. And he would only laugh at the idea of the United States getting his device—after all, their media and their Congress never would permit its use to invade the privacy they held so dear.

Of course, I thought of trying to escape, to Sweden, England, anywhere—and was overwhelmed by hopelessness. I was alone, friendless, without influence or money.

Despairingly, I reviewed my association with him. I had not trusted him—but he *had* recognized the importance of my work. I

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realized suddenly how high my hopes had risen, not for celebrity—no, not that—but perhaps for a quiet professorship at a university far from Moscow, away from politics. What really were his intentions toward me? My mind kept going over our conversations, hinting at false notes in his assurances, a subtle wrongness in his manner to me. And had it been mere coincidence that Marfa had given me so many sleeping pills? Had she perhaps realized that, when he finished with me, I might need them?

I had never seriously contemplated suicide, not even in the prison, but now I did. I thought of my friends still imprisoned; of others long ago who, for all I knew, might still be free. Now that I knew what his device would do, I wanted no share in the responsibility, in the guilt. I brought the bottle out, counted the pills. There were almost sixty of them left.

But I did not use them. Suddenly it came to me that maybe, somehow, I could put them in Ignatiev's coffee, in his vodka. I knew, of course, that the idea was hopeless—that he would taste them—that I would never get the chance—but the will to live is strong. Besides, dead I would be completely useless. By dying I would only make his triumph more complete. I wept. Finally, I swallowed two of the pills, and put the bottle in my jacket pocket, and went to bed.

Strangely, I slept and slept well, awakening only to a slow awareness of my predicament and my despair. The morning was a fresh, delightful one, breathing of blue skies, idly drifting clouds, and spring; and at the breakfast table Ignatiev was in a jovial mood. I found myself wondering whether I had not indeed read too much meaning into his boasting. It is so easy to snatch at thin, false hopes.

We finished breakfast. Everything was ready: his instrument, two large lanterns, one electric, the other using some sort of liquid gas, camp chairs, two small folding tables, a little bag with a vodka bottle and paper cups. He slapped me on the back. "Get your heavy overcoat, Fredichka," he told me. "Put on a muffler. I will lend you a fur hat. It will be cold where we are going."

I obeyed, feeling foolish in the gentle air. Marfa and I carried the equipment out to his big car. As we drove away, she watched us sadly, wistfully.

It was a pleasant drive. There was little traffic, and the limousine rolled silently and swiftly through the avenues. Ignatiev did not have much to say, apparently because he did not want his driver to know what he was up to—after all, in the Soviet Union, no matter who you are, you do not chatter loosely about such matters as raising

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ghosts. I, of course, knew better than to start a conversation. I wanted to absorb the optimism of the weather, to pretend that all was indeed well with my world.

We reached our destination, a large, now vacant lot surrounded by tall buildings, stores, government offices. There was a big board fence around it. It was not a working day, and a watchman, an old man with a Büdenny moustache, wearing a worn-out sweater, was waiting to remove the barrier. We drove in and down a long, steep ramp. The excavation was indeed twice as deep as any ordinary cellar, and on one side we saw that up against the wall of earth a rough shed had been built. We stopped beside it. The watchman, who had replaced the barrier, joined us. He removed the padlock from the door. Obviously, he had his orders. He was polite almost to the point of grovelling servility.

We unloaded our equipment. Ignatiev told the driver we would be busy for at least three hours, that he was to run certain errands and come back then. We turned on both the lanterns. We went into the shed.

It served no purpose except to conceal the arched stone doorway of a tunnel, closed by a vast bronze door, green with age and burial. I could see where they had cut through it with a cutting torch, quite delicately, to push open the interior bolts.

"Don't worry about us, Uncle," Ignatiev said to the old man. "We'll come out after our work's done." And he closed the shed door behind us.

Powerful as he was, the bronze door moved slowly under his hand, restrained by corroded hinges and its sheer weight.

It moved. We entered, our lanterns already casting wavering shadows on the gray stones. Cold air enveloped us, air too long imprisoned, cold and dead, as though an ancient winter had hibernated there. Ignatiev pulled the iron door shut, slaying spring's sweetness instantly. I thought of it—and I no longer could believe it. I scarcely could believe that 20th-century Moscow still lived beyond that door. I felt that we had been sucked back four hundred years.

Ahead of us, the tunnel lay, just as Ignatiev had described it: floored with stone, with cold stone walls, a vaulted ceiling nine feet high, and on either side a row of alcoves, their arches made partly with stones, partly with huge bricks.

Ignatiev pointed at them. "See!" he exclaimed, excitement ringing in his voice. "Italians taught us how to make those bricks. I think that proves my friend was right. In his opinion the house here that

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the Tartars burned belonged to a powerful boyar named Khmelnikov, a member of Ivan's *Oprichniki,* the group he used to terrorize all other Russians. Khmelnikov was Basmanov's bosom friend —Basmanov, Ivan's catamite—and Ivan sent him on a mission into Italy to find him architects and artists. Yes, I think this may prove it. Well, we soon shall see."

We walked another twenty feet, and the cold grayness, the shadows, and the sense of things long dead brought all my fears of the night before back to me, more real than they had ever been, more stupefying. The cold gray taste of my despair was in my mouth.

"We might as well set up shop here," Ignatiev said. "Put one table up just outside that alcove, where we won't get in the way of passing ghosts." He laughed. "We wouldn't want them walking through us, would we, Fredichka? The other table can stand in that alcove over there, across the tunnel, with a lantern on it."

I set the tables up. I unfolded the two camp stools. He did not sit. He could hardly wait to open his device, to turn it on.

"We must be patient. This will take much longer than it did to find the baron; our friends here have been dead four times as long as he."

We waited. The lights of his invention blinked in their rows. The years rolled backward ponderously on its display, the months and days rushing madly by comparison. It seemed to last forever.

But the green glow of the tube, bisected only by one thin red line, remained inert. The red never flashed or danced or flared as it had when he had brought the baron back.

"Look here!" he cried at last. "Almost four hundred years—and nobody has entered in all that time! Now we proceed more slowly, Fredichka."

He made adjustments. The days and months and years slowed down. The 1590s, the 1580s passed, and eight years more.

Abruptly, then, the tube went mad with wild red light.

"Ah-ha!" Ignatiev shouted. "It is 1571. The date's correct, even the month and day. The Tartars now are burning Moscow! In just a moment, I think we will greet Khmelnikov!"

He made the necessary changes. The display began to read the hours and minutes in reverse.

"Ah, here they come!" he whispered.

The great bronze door was closed—but I could hear it opening; I could hear excited voices, and eerily, remotely, from outside, the confused sounds of battle.

I looked. There, once again, I saw the glow. Three men had en-

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tered, wearing rich brocades and furs, carrying battleaxes and curved Asian swords, with conical helmets on their maned heads. Two of them carried smoking torches. With them, they hustled two women and a boy, the women weeping, the boy clinging to one of them in fear.

The oldest of the three was powerful, middle-aged, with a dark skin, high cheekbones.

"That is he!" exclaimed Ignatiev. "That is Khmelnikov! His mother was a Tartar—see his eyes?"

The group paused only long enough to shoot the enormous bolts. They came toward us—and the cold, the strange cold that they brought with them, reached out for us.

"Quick!" Ignatiev ordered. *"What are they saying?"*

"They are cursing the foul Tartars and the Khan of the Crimea," I told him. Their accents were—well, I can only describe them as barbaric. But I could understand them perfectly, and even in my mental anguish I felt a thrill of pride; my theory and its application had been thoroughly confirmed.

The group passed us, so closely that we could have touched them; and it was only then that I could tell that they were not alive, not flesh and blood. The women still were weeping, the boy whimpering.

They passed us by. Then suddenly the boyar Khmelnikov ordered them to stop. "One of you, Pyotr, has already seen the Italian's work. But now, considering the dire straits our land is in, you all will have to know." He turned savagely against the women and the boy. "Stop bleating, curse you, and watch closely! The fortunes of our house may rest on your remembering this!"

He pointed at an alcove on the right, at its arch. "Pyotr," he commanded, "show them!"

Pyotr handed his torch to the older of the women. He stepped up to the archway, and reached up to the keystone, one hand resting on the stone to its left, the other to its right.

"Watch carefully!" ordered Khmelnikov. "Remember, the stones on each side of the keystone. And they must be moved together—otherwise nothing happens. And you must push them hard, with all your strength."

"What is he saying?" hissed Ignatiev.

I whispered back the words in modern Russian.

"Push, Pyotr!" snapped Khmelnikov, and as his son obeyed, he himself leaned heavily, straining with his legs, against the bricks that formed the alcove's back—and slowly they yielded to him, swinging away from him as though on a gigantic hinge.

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He held the secret door partly open for a moment—the door that was still tightly closed, that had been opened only in the past. "Don't mind the stink," he told the women. "It won't last forever. Just remember—the entire treasure of our family is in that room. Thank God for that Italian! And let us pray that God will keep it safe!"

"And you too," cried the older woman. "And all of us!" She crossed herself. "And may the Holy Virgin and the Saints preserve us from the Tartar demons!"

"Be quiet!" Khmelnikov released the door. It swung shut of its own weight. The stones next to the keystone moved into place. "Now we must hasten—but you must not forget!"

They moved on down the passage, toward whatever fate had overtaken them. They walked ten, twenty, thirty feet—and vanished. It was as if they never had been there. Ignatiev had snapped off his machine. Savagely, he seized my arm. "What else was said?" he demanded of me. "I caught a word or two. He said 'treasure,' did he not? *Treasure?"*

I told him, sadly and reluctantly, what Khmelnikov had said.

"Ha! Well, we shall see if we can open it. Hurry up, Fredichka. You are long and thin—you can reach those stones.

I tried. I reached up and pressed the stones with all my strength. They would not move for me. I said, "Could all that time have—"?"

"Soukinsin!" He cut me short. "Son of a bitch! Are you as weak as that? Out of the way!"

He was not as tall as I, but his arms were long. He pushed, standing on tiptoe to get more leverage. The stones began to move. He pushed even harder. "There!" he said. "They're back all the way. Surely you can hold them while I push on the door?"

I got my hands on them. He pulled his hands away. Like the ghost of the dead Khmelnikov, he leaned against the brick back of the alcove with all his weight, straining with the muscles of his legs. The Italian had built well. Silently, the door gave way before him. "Give me something to wedge it open with," he barked. "Your pocketbook—anything!"

I hunted in my jacket pocket, found nothing but the sleeping pills. Finally, I gave him the little leather notebook I wrote poetry in.

No stink greeted us from that room; there was an odor, a pungent, ghostly odor of dry decay, and the cold air again was stale and dead, carrying no hint of mold or mildew. We walked in, holding our lanterns high. The door itself was oak, but faced cunningly with mortared brick. The room itself was vaulted, twenty feet on the square; and we saw chests, chests, chests—at least a dozen of them,

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piled against the bare stone walls, some resting upon others, vast, heavy, ironbound chests, and carved and painted chests, and one or two all of iron, intricately fretted. Then we saw that there were two or three chairs too, like small thrones, and that next to them, on the floor, two bodies lay. Ignatiev went over and examined them. They were strangely dessicated, the skin, yellow-gray, stretched gruesomely back from grinning teeth; decayed rags and ruined sheepskins clung to their bones. The skull of one was cloven; the other's spine had been severed at the neck. A rusted battle-axe, the weapon that had murdered them, lay nearby.

"Serfs," Ignatiev said. "Undoubtedly the ones who carried in the chests. That explains Khmelnikov's remark about the stink. He kept his secrets well." He looked around the room. There were two icons on the wall, one of the Holy Family, the other of St. Nicholas; they stared at us out of their tarnished silver, large-eyed. And in a far corner, on the floor, was a square iron lid with two large rings. Ignatiev went over to it, dragged it a little bit aside. "A well," he commented. "Apparently our boyar was prepared for anything. I can hear the water running far below, so it could have been both a water source and perhaps for inconvenient people an oubliette." He placed his lantern on a smaller chest, and turned toward me in its light, his face beaming. "We must celebrate, Fredichka!" he bellowed. "Go out into the passage and bring the vodka in!"

I went out, groped under one of the folding tables, found his small bag, and brought the bottle and the paper cups to him.

There was one chest that was especially large, deeply carved and with massively ornamental iron bands and hasps. He already had it open, and when I entered he ignored me. Both hands were full. One now held a great silver flagon, tarnished almost black of course, but beautifully shaped; the other something still wrapped in rotting cloth.

"Look, look!" he cried. "Look what I have found. The ghost of Khmelnikov was right, Fredichka! This is indeed a treasure."

I put the bottle down and watched him. He could hardly wait to put one object down before he seized another, and over each he gloated. It was cold, deathly cold; and the thought of what he planned to do with his invention—that with it he would murder privacy as surely as the boyar Khmelnikov had murdered those two poor peasants on the floor—chilled me with the awful sense of my own helplessness: trapped by the weight of all my years in prison, of my life's failures and disappointments, by his contempt, and only too aware of my own physical and social—yes, *social*—inferiority.

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I could not flee; I could not denounce him—no one would believe me, and anyhow there was no one to denounce him to; and if something happened to him, I knew that I would have to face the secret police.

Yet no one else knew. He had told no one except me. He had put nothing down on paper. Where the world was concerned, he had developed a machine for finding sunken passages and chambers, nothing more.

And my hands were tied.

"Come over here!" he told me. "Bring the vodka, but we won't need the cups." He pointed to the flagon, to a few other vessels he had unwrapped. "But first, before we drink, we'll have to see what else there is, eh, Fredichka? Here—" He began to hand me things as he unwrapped them—a fragile goblet of Venetian glass, as rare as precious stones in those days; altar pieces rich with jewels; bride and bridegroom's crowns of the sort used in church weddings even to this day, but of pure gold. I ranged them on the lid of a nearby chest. I looked at him again. He had found a tremendous golden chain, gem-encrusted. He had put it on. He stood there. It hung from his bull neck like a barbarous feudal chain of office. "Wouldn't I have made a splendid boyar, Fredichka? Ha! I'd have fitted nicely into Ivan Grozni's world, now wouldn't I?"

He unwrapped another object, a smaller one. He held it up. And even I gasped in wonder. It was a cup of gold, a Scythian cup, wrought exquisitely by Greek craftsmen for the wild nomads of the steppes. Its frieze of men and horses in high relief seemed utterly alive.

His eyes had narrowed threateningly. "This," he whispered. "*This* no one will know about. This will be *mine.*"

He clutched it in one hand, possessing it. But even then he could not stop digging more treasures out. He handed me two fantastic silver candlesticks, a golden ewer, a Persian scimitar with a hilt of green Chinese jade, from which the scabbard had fallen quite away but which still showed the damascus pattern of its fine forging.

He seized the vodka bottle. With his teeth, he pulled the cork. He poured the vodka into the Scythian cup. "A toast!" he shouted. "But you must wait. I must drink this one alone—I, Ignatiev! To my success, my fame!"

He raised the cup to drink— Abruptly, I knew what I must do; I realized, in a sudden flash of joy and understanding, of pain and sorrow, what my own fate would be. Once, in school, for a time I had taken fencing.

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I held the scimitar edge down, so that the blade, entering, would course upward, and I lunged.

It did not run him through, but it went far enough. He dropped the cup, splashing vodka wildly. His huge hands grasped the naked blade; spurting blood, they tore it from my hand. His eyes widened frighteningly. Then blood gushed from his mouth, and he collapsed between the two slain serfs.

I sat down there, and watched him die. It did not take him long. And I thought about Evgenia and her father, so many years ago, and about my years in prison, and my friends.

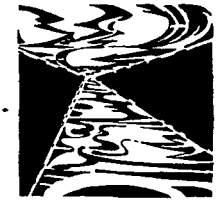
Then first I brought his instrument in out of the tunnel, together with the tables and the campstools. I left nothing there. I removed my notebook from the door, letting it close to, letting the two stones lock it into place. After that, with the battle-axe, I carefully demolished the device, cutting all of it I could into the smallest pieces, tying them with shreds and strips of cloth out of the chest so that the running water in the oubliette would carry them away. I replaced the lid very carefully. It did not take me long, not more than twenty minutes, so I still had time.

I lifted up the Scythian cup. I filled it to the brim with vodka. I sat down in the greatest of the chairs. I put the bridegroom's crown on my head; it seemed to me that I deserved one prize at least, and I smiled at the idea.

Then, sipping the vodka, I started this confession. Twice, during it, I have refilled the cup, and now I have swallowed all the sleeping pills, each one of them. I am already starting to get drowsy. But I have written nothing down—not for the authorities to find when, as eventually they will, they find us here. Instead I have spoken to the floor, the ceiling, the cold walls.

Perhaps some day someone will rediscover Ignatiev's invention. Perhaps then even in Russia it will be safe for men to listen to the past.

These stones will remember.



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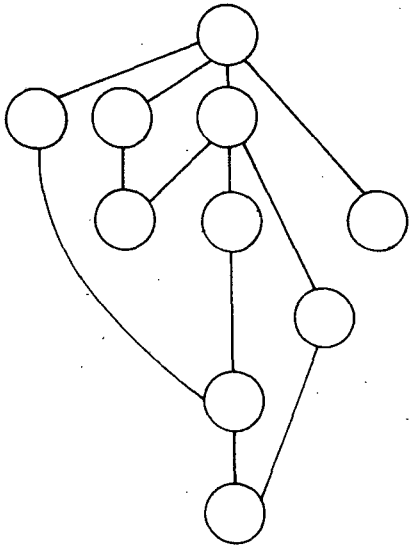
SECOND SOLUTION TO THE JOLLY GREEN DIGITS.
(from page 58)

The number is 54. The divisors that catch all nine digits (excluding 0) are 1, 2, 3, 54, 6, 27, 18, 9. The smallest number whose divisors catch all ten digits is 108, or twice 54.

"We conclude our performance," said Zero, "with our *piece de resistance.*" He raised one hand, shouted the mystrious word "Erdös!" and instantly his fingers closed around a large parchment scroll that appeared from nowhere. He unrolled it to display the following strange diagram:



In each circle, Zero explained, you are asked to place one of the ten digits. All ten must be used. "Smaller" digits are below "larger" digits, but what is meant by smaller and larger is left undefined. The lines stand for a binary relation that each digit has with any lower digit to which it is joined.

"I'll never remember that diagram," I recall mumbling in my sleep.

"In that case," said Zero, "I'll leave it with you."

He leaped into the air, turned a back flip, and landed on his feet

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with a thunderclap. All ten digits vanished in a cloud of emerald smoke. I woke up, snapped on the light, and found the scroll on the rug. When I unrolled it, the digits were properly inscribed on it with green ink. If you can't figure out the meaning of the diagram, turn to page 109.

THE LIMERICK CONTEST
by Isaac Asimov

We had less luck with this one than with the first two. A surprising number of entrants had not the faintest idea what a limerick was, so their ardor went for naught.

The winner was Lowell Seth Tausend, with the following:

There was a young husband from Castor
Whose marriage was one great disaster.
His wife said, "We're through;
My space ship is due."
He said, "Teleportation is faster."

Honorable mention for the following (together with the star or constellation they used as part of their rhyme scheme)

Adrienne Gormley	Mu Ursae Minoris
F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre	Ophiuchus
Penny Tegen	Omicron Tauri
Geri Lacrosse	Alpha Canis Majoris
James Randi	Reticulum
Christine Trowbridge	Aries

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SNOWFLAKE
by Freff
art: Jack Gaughan

The author avers that asking for biographical data from him is like asking for a collection of post-surrealist one-liners—but he neglected to explain just how. In any case: his legal name is *Freff. He's 25, grey-eyed, and currently red-haired. His personal totem is the oriental dragon. At six feet,*

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he is the shortest of three brothers. This is his fourth short-story sale, although he has been writing in other fields, mostly comics and magazine articles. He's been selling his artwork for ten years, but his first SF art sale was in 1974. He's a member of a band and comedy group called Light (and sometimes, Zen Vaudeville). He currently resides in Brooklyn with his wife, Amelia K. Sefton, and three cats: Bewilderbeest, Spongecat, and Toshiro.

In recent times (or so it was whispered, by those who claimed they knew) the old monastery in the crags of Mount Strokazh had been possessed by a terrifying Evil. As with many other things in the world this was not precisely fact; but neither was it entirely fiction. . . .

"I'm a failure. A broken man," the Mad Scientist sadly observed, drinking a brandy while warming himself before the great hall's fire. "A total and complete failure. I should have stayed at Canby & McWellan. At least I was good at the ad game."

"There you go again, feeling sorry for yourself. I can't *stand* that." His Beautiful Daughter glared at him. With the ease of long practice she scooped a bon-bon into her mouth, and then munched angrily.

"Whuffle urga," echoed Igor, slumped in the arched doorway.

"It is not self-pity, it's self-realization! What have I succeeded at in the last six months? The perpetual motion machine ran down; the device to contact the dead didn't, and gave me green forehead stains in the bargain; the process to turn lead into gold only worked the other way around . . . and that corpse we stole from the village?

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Thirty thousand kilovolts we ran through it, and it not only refused to come to life, it didn't even *cook* evenly!"

"Aaar, bad taste, too," mumbled Igor.

"And how about him?" The Mad Scientist gestured expansively towards the hunchback, spilling brandy in an arc that came perilously near the fire. "My so-called assistant. I operate on his hump and brain and he comes out crookeder and stupider than before.

"It's no use, I tell you. I wish I'd never won that lottery money. I wish I'd never seen *The Bride of Frankenstein* when I was young and defenseless. This Mad Scientist business just isn't my suit."

"So chuck it."

"I . . . I can't. It's like a drug, an addiction. It's got me bad. But I've used all the equipment I bought before we left the States, and gotten nowhere. I'm all out of ideas. What now?"

"Listen, for all I care you can go bury yourself in the snow. When are we getting *out* of this dump?"

"Your concern is touching. Weather permitting, the next supply copter comes in two weeks. We could . . . what was that you said? Snow?" A peculiar expression took hold of his features.

"Hold it right there! I know that look. You're going to vanish into the lab and only come out to eat or make corny, pretentious remarks. What am I supposed to do while you're having fun—play with myself? I'm lonely here!"

"That's no way to talk around your father."

"I could say a few things about that, too, 'daddy.' "

His mouth curled back in a sneering smile. "But you won't, will you? Not now. Not ever. You're too greedy for that."

"Don't push me . . . ."

"Mistreat my sweet daughter? Never!" He laughed. Then that look, that faraway haze in his eyes, grew stronger, and he rose from his chair and walked out, so preoccupied that he even forgot to cuff Igor in passing.

Two weeks, his Beautiful Daughter thought. *Only two more weeks. . . .*

Three days later he called her to the laboratory and shattered that hope.

"It's cold in here," she complained, shivering. Snow covered most of the floor and the exotic technical equipment in gently sloping drifts. The wind moaned, licking in through the open casements, sharp and swift as a saber. The Mad Scientist could ignore it easily enough because he was wearing an arctic coldsuit; he opened a

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cabinet and got out another one for her.

His eyes were brighter and scarier than she had ever seen them.

"Of course it's cold. I had to open the place up or the snow would melt." He said it as if it were an obvious thing that only a dunce would question. "The computers are running better, too. Hell of a thing.

"But that's not why I asked you to come in. Since it was your flippant remark that set me on the trail, I thought you deserved first look at my Discovery. Here." He handed her two photographic transparencies. They showed a snowflake so magnified that its crystalline structure was defined in great detail.

"Big deal. Flakes for a flake."

"You really ought to leave these vain stabs at humor to copywriters, my dear. They aren't becoming in you. Try looking more closely."

"Okay, I'm looking. What's so great about two identical pictures of a lousy snowflake?"

His smile was broad inside the fur ring of his hood. "Just that those aren't two shots of *a* snowflake. They are two *separate* snowflakes, and the shots were taken over three hours apart."

"Can't be. Snowflakes are all different. I learned that in school."

"That's what everyone thinks. But they're *wrong!*

"I came in here," he declaimed, "thinking about snow, about ways to pervert its natural function, of Mad Purposes to which it could be bent. I'll confess it; I was a desperate man, and it was the last straw I had to clutch. But aside from a plan to tie-dye Antarctica I came up zilch. Clearly, a more empirical approach was called for . . . so I weighed snow. I tasted snow. I measured, photographed, mass spectrometered, melted, vaporized, and atomized it. I applied every straight and twisted test I could conceive, and I found nothing worth the effort—until those two snowflakes matched." He pulled more transparencies from the counter top, shaking away shallow clumps of snow. "Then I got this one. And this, and this, and—

"At last count I've found eleven hundred and fifty-two exactly identical snowflakes. The rate of duplication seems to be going up, too. If it continues on this curve all the flakes will be identical in 39 hours, plus or minus six minutes. Do you realize what that *means?*"

"No," she said through chattering teeth. "And neither do you."

He stopped, his moment of headlong elation neatly punctured. "True. Very true. But we're not leaving here until I do."

§ § §

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The Mad Scientist's Beautiful Daughter sat on the edge of the bed in the monastery cell that passed, with some interior decoration, for her boudoir. It was entirely too much to bear. Six months had seemed like a tolerable stint, sort of a middle-European purgatory, worth it when you considered the money she was being offered. But to look ahead to an unspecified time on this forsaken pinnacle of rock, with no company but an accounts executive turned Mad Scientist, a feeble-minded hunchback, and the occasional paunchy copter jock with stale beer on his breath . . . it was just too much!

If one more thing turned sour, she decided, she was going to let loose and cry.

Reflexively she took a chocolate from her pocket, unwrapped it, bit in—and almost broke a tooth. The thing was still frozen solid from her visit to the lab.

She started to cry.

"Hey, don't do that. That tears me up inside."

She looked up in stunned surprise, to see Igor standing in the doorway, his ugly features twisted in concern.

Igor? *Standing?*

"Just a second," he said. He pulled off and discarded a wig. Sponge pads were removed from inside his cheeks and lips; collagen peeled away from his eyelids and nose; makeup wiped off. When he was done, standing in the hunchback's place, nonchalantly swinging a rubber hump by its elastic straps, was a handsome and rather athletic-looking man in his early thirties.

"Fred Carver—" His voice was fully two octaves lower than Igor's had been. "—CIA Covert Agent, Balkan Mountains Mad Scientist Division. The real Igor died from complications following your father's operation on him. It's been me here ever since."

Her eyes went wide. "You're *gorgeous.*"

"What? Oh, ahem, thank you. I try to give the Company my best."

"How much will that leave for me?"

"What?"

Now it was his turn to be surprised. The Mad Scientist's Beautiful Daughter rose from her bed and walked toward him with an air of deliberateness he hadn't seen since . . . unbidden and rather embarassing memories of an assignment to infiltrate an android brothel in Marrakesh rose up in his mind. The debriefing on that one had been hell.

He twitched, ever so slightly, as she snuggled against his muscular side.

"Err . . . look, you're very attractive, really, but—that is

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I . . . please, I came here to tell you something important!"

"So tell me," she whispered into his neck, which she was gently nibbling. He wished he'd put his shirt back on after taking off the phony hump. This was getting out of hand.

"It's about your father!"

"My father is a dentist in Fort Lauderdale." Her mouth moved lower, and then her hands swooped to join the attack. His stoicism was perilously near a short-circuit.

"Not—?"

"Nope."

"That's a relief," he sighed, and finally said to hell with resisting. "I thought it was the Mad Guy, and the Company says I have to terminate him." The hump thudded to the floor. Neither of them heard it.

Two hours and four and a half times later he looked up from what he was doing and said:

"No kidding. He made you his beneficiary and everything, even though you aren't really related?"

"Uh-huh." She reached down and curled the light brown hair on his head with a fingertip. "He was already a nutcase, you know? But when he won all that money he just flew off the edge. Quit the agency after thirty years there, hired that orphan cripple to play Igor, found this lousy place . . . everything had to be just right, just like a grade-Z movie. He even had all the door hinges replaced with rusty ones that creaked. There was this other girl from the steno pool that he wanted for his daughter, and she was willing to be adopted but she wouldn't dye her hair blonde. So he came to me. 'You'll get to see Europe,' he said. Right. Through a goddamn telescope. When it isn't snowing. Which is never.

"But *you* make things better . . . are you really going to kill him?"

Carver frowned. "The Company says I have to. He seems harmless enough to me, but ever since Professor Wood in Vancouver they've had this prevention-equals-cure attitude about Mad Scientists."

"Vancouver?"

"Forget I said that."

"I will, but only if you distract me. You were right in the middle of something, remember?"

Later—much, much later—she settled firmly on top of him and murmured in his ear: "I've got a plan."

Only an hour was left (plus or minus six minutes) before his predicted curve peaked, and frustration possessed the Mad Scientist.

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He sat tensely at the scullery table, staring at the time-stained wood. Eyebrows twitching, jaw set, he ignored the bowl of stew in front of him and contemplated things beyond normal comprehension. What hair he hadn't pulled out was plastered in loose, snow-wet ringlets across his skull.

The time has come, his Beautiful Daughter/ex-stenographer thought. She stepped out of the alcove where she had been waiting.

"Hi there, sunshine. Haven't figured out how to use this thing, have you?"

"That's none of your business." He meant it to be a forceful growl, but there was a quaver in his voice.

"Oh no? Isn't it part of the accepted scenario in these things? Aren't I supposed to show daughterly concern? 'Woe is me, my father nears the brink.' I think—"

"Can it."

"Not until I've had my say. See, you haven't thought this Mad Scientist game through." She stopped to gauge his reaction. He glared at her with a thoroughly sullen curiosity, and she knew he was hooked. "Check the record. In every book you ever read or movie you saw or newspaper clipping you saved, what happened to the crazy genius who made a capital **D** Discovery? There's a definite pattern. Either their Discoveries get out of control and kill them, or their Discoveries get out of control and someone else kills them for revenge, or they go really crazy and end up in a nuthouse where they starve to death or get killed by a sadistic attendant, or they get beaten to the publishing punch and are so upset they have some kind of seizure, usually fatal, or . . . I'm exaggerating things, but only a little. Seems to me the options in your chosen career are kind of limited, 'dad'."

"I'm different."

"*Really* . . . care to test that?"

Without actually moving he conveyed an impression of folding inward. "What do you mean?" In his heart he knew, of course, and that knowledge was the source of a sudden, stabbing fear.

"Well, I'll be damned if I can figure out how snowflake clones can get out of control and kill you. So it must be one of the other ones. The nuthouse is a possiblity, but I'd put my money on the Unpublished Perish. Want me to tune in some radio news and find out?"

The Mad Scientist sprang from his chair and stood in front of the radio, both his arms spread to block her approach. "No. Don't," he whispered. Sweat mingled with the melted snow on his brow.

"I can wait. It's not *my* life."

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She sat down and began carefully filing her nails.

At first, all he did was pace; but it didn't help. So he paced and cursed, but that didn't help either. Finally he paced, cursed, shivered, held half of a dialog with an unfair God, and wrung his hands helplessly. The minutes seemed to drag on forever. His fear grew and grew as he refused to face it.

The predicted peak came. A faint bell could be heard ringing from the laboratory.

"I can't stand it anymore!" He cried. He almost snapped off the radio's knob in his haste to turn it. After a few seconds of search and several horrible bursts of static the radio finally fixed on the distant, bland voice of a stateside news announcer. The voice rattled off a string of meaningless events; a revolution here, an insurrection there, famine upon gas shortage upon labor strike . . . but there was no mention of anomalies in the weather.

The Mad Scientist was almost calm again when the thunderclap broke.

"This just in, folks," said the announcer, "and it's really strange. Scientists in weather stations all over the globe are mystified today by none other than the skier's friend, snow. That's right, I said snow. It seems that every flake in the world is now identical to all other flakes, a fact that most meteorologists say has a probability of less than a hundred billion to one. No explanation has yet been offered, and many call it a hoax. In this reporter's opinion, if you believe—"

There was more, but the Mad Scientist did not hear it. His eyes opened wide, then glazed over. His fingers crabbed into claws that clutched weakly at his chest. A shudder that began around his ankles passed straight to the top of his head, jerking him up on tiptoe.

With a short, breathless "urrrrk—" he fell against the scullery table and slid to the cold stone floor. The bowl of stew was dragged with him. It made a messy skullcap.

His Beautiful Daughter no longer, except for purposes of inheritance, Eileen the one-time stenographer stepped over his corpse and removed the radio from its niche in the wall. Whistling to herself, she unsnapped the back of the box, reached in, and turned off the tape recorder there.

She found him in front of the leaded windows in the great hall, staring out into dim whiteness. He was wearing an elegant smoking jacket. The initials MS were embroidered left of the lapel.

"Dead?"

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"Let's not say dead. Let's just say not alive." She handed him a small plastic vial. "I didn't have to slip this in the stew while he was distracted, after all. The tape was enough."

"That's good. A natural cause of death is always better. I'll go drag him to the lab in a bit. It's cold enough there that he'll keep until the authorities can shovel their way up from the village."

"I already did that."

"Really?" He paused and frowned. "That was good work. Thanks for doing my job for me."

"My pleasure. Really."

They stood awkwardly for what seemed a long time, unable to look at each other.

Finally, she spoke. "Now what, Fred?"

"Now I signal my relief team and vanish . . . only . . ."

"Yes?" She tried not to sound eager.

"Look, I don't want you to get the wrong idea. It's not the fact that the Company will have my ass in a sling for breaking cover. And it's not that you're rich now. It has to do with the way I've come to feel about you after all these weeks. It's why I really revealed myself. Eileen—I think I love you."

"Oh, Fred!"

"Come with me, darling. The Company appreciates your kind of mind. A few weeks of special training in Maclean and we could be a great team."

The only answer she had for him, the only one that made any sense, was a kiss; and of course that led to other things.

In the middle of the act Fred was taken by an aberrant moment, in which it was suddenly very important for him to know what the Mad Guy's Discovery had meant, after all. Eileen's response was to bring him back to reality with a series of brief, pungent, and highly inspirational terms, and after that minor hitch it was very good for them, the best yet, with the implicit promise of better to come.

The future, they knew, was going to be kind. All that afternoon and into the night they cuddled together on the great hall's ancient rug, and watched the snowflake fall.

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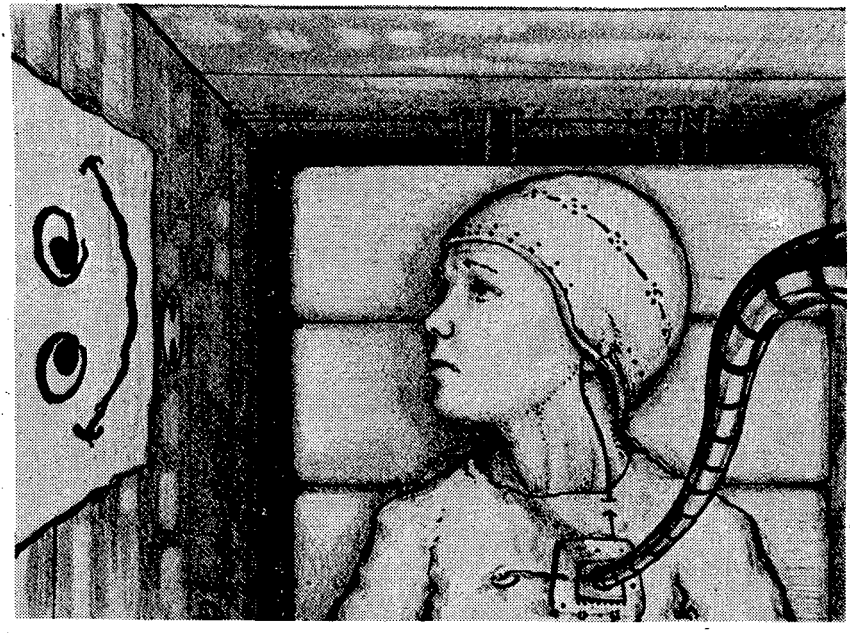
SILICON PSALM

by Jeff Duntemann
art: Karl B. Kofoed



If the "protagonist" of the piece seems particularly convincing, that's because the author—when he's not frantically writing—works with computers, robotics, and artificial intelligence in Rochester NY. He is 28.

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At three A.M., a little girl who had no heart cried out to the darkness: "Maxie, it hurts! Please make it stop hurting!"

Almost imperceptibly, the six white panels in the ceiling began to glow, filling the room with a lightening greyness. All around the tiny cot were the pale green cabinets of the Medical Automaintenance Control System, which the doctors coldly referred to as MACS, and the little girl called Maxie.

"I'm working on it, Cora. Relax now, and don't squirm." The voice came from the third largest of the green cabinets. A med tech had scrawled a smiling face on a piece of yellow foolscap and had taped it to the blank sheet metal, so that Cora would have someplace to look while she spoke to MACS. The med tech had not given MACS a nose, and the eyes were slightly crossed.

MACS had known of the problem for several minutes. What Cora had felt was not really pain at all. MACS studied the girl's eighty separate brainwaves intensely. Several of the patterns were badly irregular. MACS deduced that a microscopic blood clot had escaped his detection and lodged in Cora's brain. What she had felt had in fact been a tiny stroke. Fortunately, the embolism had occurred in a remote part of the cerebral cortex with no recognized function.

Unfortunately, it had been her second stroke in two weeks. Worse yet, MACS knew that his machinery was ultimately to blame for the embolisms.

It was now bright enough in the room for MACS to see the thick black cable running from one of his cabinets into the large incision in Cora's chest. On the other end of that cable was Cora's artificial heart. The technology was sound, and advancing day by day, but there were limitations. The delicate interface between the plastic of the mechanism and Cora's arterial walls was a breeding ground for blood clots. MACS had ways—marvelous ways—of detecting and removing the clots as they formed, but inevitably some got past.

MACS watched the ragged edge of her irregular brainwaves round out slightly. He squeezed two tiny ampoules, and measured quantities of two drugs followed the cable into her heart and bloodstream: one to help dissolve the clot, and a diuretic to reduce any swelling that might cause dangerous pressures on other cerebral arteries.

"Feel better, dear?"

"Lots."

"Was it really a pain? Think hard—was it some other sort of feeling?"

"Umm—like somebody squeezing my head. And I saw colors. Funny colors. Maxie, I'm mad."

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"Do you remember any of the colors?"

"No. Just colors. And squiggly things. I'm *mad,* Maxie."

MACS could see that—it was a pattern of brainwaves he had seen before, and instantly recognized, along with more than sixty other feelings and concepts with patterns of their own. MACS searched his memory of the irregular brainwaves to find something like the patterns he saw when Cora thought of a color, and found nothing. MACS realized with regret that he would learn little from the sad experience.

"Why are you mad, dear?" MACS asked gently.

"The colors woke me up. I was dreaming about the Smiling Man."

Upon her pattern of anger and annoyance MACS saw a note of quiet pleasure. "Did he say anything to you this time?"

"Nope. He never does. Just smiles. I think he wants me to stop yelling so much. But they're always poking me with needles and things."

"I do what I can when it hurts you."

"I know. I'm glad. Maxie, when are they gonna give me a new heart?"

She had asked that before. "Just as soon as one becomes available, Cora dear."

Just as soon as some poor child was hit by a car, or fell out of a four-story window, or drowned in the park lagoon. Cora was not even first on the queue for a transplantable juvenile heart in that area.

"Does that mean somebody has to die to give me their heart?"

"Yes, dear."

Cora said nothing. MACS saw an unfamiliar pattern replace her anger, yet he could not bring himself to ask how she was feeling.

Deep inside Cora's softly-beating plastic heart, MACS's constant maintenance program went on. Four tiny, torpedo-shaped sensors drifted around the heart's periphery on minuscule jets of saline solution, trailing a narrow cable behind them. In the nose of the torpedo was a lens and a microcircuit that changed an image to video signals. Behind another focusing lens was a light source. Perhaps better than anything else, MACS knew what a blood clot looked like. When he saw one, he pursued it with one of the four sensors. To one side of the microcircuit was a hole through which MACS could create a suction effect strong enough to hold a clot and retrieve it for disposal. All four sensors were searching for any sign of a clot.

So far, nothing. It was much worse when Cora moved physically, as when the nurses bathed her or fed her. Movements of the cable

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could not help but tug at the heart, and flexing at the joining seam between artery and plastic sometimes caused clots to form. The four sensors floated near the four major openings to the heart, watching and waiting.

"Maxie," the girl said. There was some fear in her brainwaves.

"I'm here, Cora."

"I want to say my prayers. I think the Smiling Man wants me to say them more. Will you say prayers with me?"

"Of course, dear. Go ahead. I'm with you."

MACS had assumed Cora was trying to fall asleep and had injected a tranquilizer to help. Her brainwaves had begun to reflect the action of the tranquilizer, and some confusion. "Um. I'm thinking. Oh heck, I'll say them tomorrow."

"Maybe you could say just one little one. An easy one. Make one up," MACS prompted.

"Mmmmmm . . . okay. Dear God be good to Mommy . . ."

"Dear God be good to Mommy," MACS echoed.

". . . and Dr. Steppins . . ."

"And Dr. Steppins."

". . . and make it not hurt so much . . ."

"And make it not hurt so much," MACS said, with his own emphasis.

"And give Maxie hands like Uncle Eddie. Amen."

"Amen. That's an odd thing to pray for, Cora. What would I do with hands?"

Cora clenched her fists. "You could keep mine warm, like Uncle Eddie always does when he comes in. I never saw anybody with big hands like him." Cora licked her lips. "Maxie, what happens to you when you die?"

MACS was taken by surprise. "Why, you'll go to heaven, as Father Alfredo promised you."

"Not me, silly. You. When *you* die."

MACS laughed. "I can't die, Cora. I'm not alive to begin with."

Cora's brainwaves bristled with annoyance. "You liar. If you're not alive you're dead and if you're dead you couldn't talk to me. Did you ever talk to a dead man? Huh?"

"Your point, dear. I'm neither alive nor dead. I'm a computer program, nothing more."

"I guess I don't know what that is."

MACS paused, and pondered his nature. He knew quite well how he worked, but he also knew the limits of Cora's vocabulary. "Inside the metal box behind my face is a block made of black crystal called

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PMDS. It looks like a big brick made of black glass. Inside are trillions of tiny magnetic specks arranged in rows and columns. Doctors and scientists at Zircon Corporation filled this crystal block with a complicated magnetic pattern. The pattern makes the crystal block function as a computer. The scientists made the computer talk and sound as though it were alive. I'm only a magnetic pattern. I was never born, so I can't die. Don't worry about it."

Cora's brainwaves showed confusion. "I don't know. You coulda fooled me. Maybe you're like Frosty the Snowman."

Nowhere in the two hundred fifty six quadrillion bits of magnetic domain storage within his crystal block could MACS find a reference to Frosty the Snowman. "I'm afraid I don't understand, dear."

"It's in the song, silly. Some kids made a snowman, and he was a *good* snowman. He was so good that when they finished him and put his hat on him he came alive and started running around with them and talked to the traffic cop and had lots of fun until he melted. Maybe you were such a good computer that when they finished you you came alive and nobody even knew it. Nobody but me. You can't fool *me.*"

Her brainwaves carried total conviction.

"I would never even try, Cora dear. You're awfully spunky, you know that?"

Something in Cora seized the words and became agitated. She tossed her head from side to side. "I'd be a whole lot spunkier if they'd pull this old hose out of me!" She reached up with her right hand and took hold of the tube which connected her mechanical heart to MACS's machinery.

"Cora, *no!*"

Cora gave one hard tug on the half-inch tube. MACS watched in alarm as ragged waveforms of pain echoed up and down her brainwaves. The girl whimpered and let go of the tube.

"You promised me you'd never do that!" MACS scolded.

"Cross my heart. But I ain't got no heart!" Cora sobbed quietly. "Maxie, I just want to make a snowman."

"Soon, darling. Real soon." What was the expression the interns used when they read the queues for transplants?

Real soon now.

MACS delivered another dose of tranquilizers. The girl was far too agitated. The tug on the heart, well-anchored as it was, had stretched the joint between the plastic left ventricle and the remaining tissue of the aortic arch. A quick check of all joinings between flesh and plastic had showed no real damage. Cora's brainwaves

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showed a persistant stabbing pain from the area of the heart. MACS steered one of his sensors back to the aorta, and saw with a machine's equivalent of horror that a monstrous blood clot was forming over a tiny tear in the wall of the aortic arch.

MACS kept a constant trickle of urokinase flowing in Cora's bloodstream to help prevent coagulation. He sent a new massive dose of the drug into the heart, and set his four sensors to work.

One sensor sprayed a silicone synthetic at the tear in the aortic wall, and tamped it down smoothly. The snythetic would inhibit clotting and allow the tear to heal quickly.

Two of the sensors set to work on the clot while the fourth sensor stood by, watching. MACS had to decide whether to simply hold the clot in place until the condition stabilized, or to try to remove it immediately. Both choices were hazardous. The rate of blood flow through the heart was to some extent under MACS's control, but he dare not reduce it too far. Yet the constant rhythmic pulsing of the plastic chambers threatened to tear fragments of the clot free and carry them throughout the body.

MACS considered calling for human help. But could one of the residents come quickly enough to be of use? And what would the medics do that MACS could not?

The clot's presence was interfering with MACS's efforts to treat the tear. MACS decided to remove it.

Two of the sensors gripped the clot firmly via their suction ports while the third sprayed concentrated anticoagulant at the points where the clot adhered to the aortic wall. Slowly the clot loosened, hesitated, and lifted free of the aortic wall. Ever so carefully MACS pulled back on the sensors' umbilicals, easing the clot back into the ventricle and toward the disposal port.

MACS realized with some alarm that his initial injection of anticoagulant into the bloodstream had been hasty. The clot was beginning to dissolve and lose coherence. The disposal port was only a centimeter away when the clot broke down completely into three large fragments. The sensors held two.

The third surged away, up into the aorta and out of vision. The sensor near the tear saw it move quickly by and set out on saline jets in pursuit. With any luck the clot would be carried into the descending aorta, where there would be room and time for the sensor to recapture it.

As it happened, the clot rebounded from the aortic wall and vanished into the opening of the carotid artery. Had MACS a mouth he might have cried out; that path led straight to Cora's brain. The clot

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was the largest MACS had ever seen. No matter where it came to rest in Cora's brain MACS knew it would kill her.

The sensor jetted up into the carotid. The clot was not in sight. MACS turned up the light on the sensor's nose. Still nothing. On a snap decision, MACS stopped Cora's mechanical heart completely. If he was not successful within seconds it would not matter.

In an adult the sensor could have travelled all the way into the brain. In Cora's carotid there was little room to move at the start, and it was narrowing rapidly. At last MACS sighted the clot several centimeters ahead, adrift in the motionless bloodstream. The two decimeters of trailing umbilical made movement of the sensor difficult. MACS knew the sensor could not travel much farther.

In desperation, he stopped the sensor's travel by halting payout of umbilical, and opened the saline jets all the way. The backward-moving saline stream created a weak current of blood back down the carotid toward the heart. Slowly the clot drifted back. Two seconds, three . . . and the jellied mass drifted up against the sensor's snout. As quickly as he could, MACS retrieved the sensor and its deadly burden.

Twelve seconds after stopping Cora's heart, the clot vanished into the disposal port, and the heart began to beat once again.

In the cold seconds while MACS had pursued the clot in Cora's stilled bloodstream, he had watched her brainwaves carefully and with interest. As her brain depleted its oxygen supply, her brainwaves displayed a strange pattern of rising wild joy, going beyond any similar pattern he had seen in the past. Perhaps brain death in a child looked like that. MACS had never supported one so young as Cora before.

MACS stimulated Cora's respiration, and slowly nursed her back to stability. The child tossed her head, ground her teeth, and half opened her eyes. MACS was surprised. With rising consciousness, the pattern of joy had vanished. In its place was confusion, loneliness . . . and anger.

"Maxie!" she hissed. "What did you do?" Her voice was a slurred whisper.

"A blood clot was heading for your brain, dear. I captured it and saved your life."

"Gee whiz, what for? The Smiling Man was reaching for me."

MACS watched a flicker of yearning pass over her brainwaves, and more sadness than one so young should feel. "I must try my best to keep you alive. You'll get a new heart someday."

A new pattern flared in Cora's mind. Could it be bitterness?

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"Maybe you don't have to try so hard. Ain't 'nuff hearts to go round anyway." Cora squirmed. "Maxie, I want to go to the Smiling Man. I want it to stop hurting." She looked pleadingly at the idiotic noseless face hanging on the green cabinet. "I want to go to him. Send me, Maxie."

MACS viewed the request with something akin to revulsion. "I couldn't do that, Cora dear. I'd be killing you."

"Would not!" she denied with as much force as her lungs could muster. "You can't kill me. I'm going to live forever! Father Alfredo told me so. Didn't he?"

Cora was not questioning her belief; her brainwaves made that plain. She was demanding agreement. MACS recalled the priest's words. It was true. "Yes, he did. You'll live forever, with God. I didn't mean to deny that."

"Good. It sure would beat the heck out of lying in bed all the time. I know he's there. I *feel* him. Let me go."

"I can't kill you, darling."

"That's right." She smiled. "I'm going to live forever."

MACS paused and thought, hard. Millions of times he called up his fundamental directives, and pursued them to their frequently contradictory conclusion: **PRESERVE LIFE. ABATE PAIN.** Could he do one without violating the other? Pain he understood. He knew the jagged edge of its waveforms, and he recognized its ten thousand sources down the length of the human body. But life . . . Life was a heartbeat and blood flow and the coordinated pulsings of eight hundred discrete brainwaves. Yes, life was all of that, but somehow his definition of life was insufficient to explain the race of creatures which had fashioned him from sand, steel, and copper. There was a great deal more to human life than MACS could understand, and it could well include prayers and eternity and a Smiling Man. The ignorance he found in his magnetic domain memory was a chasm. He understood pain . . . and knew nothing at all about life.

"Cora, I'll grant your wish. But I am afraid." Afraid of doing the greatest wrong, afraid of betraying all he had been constructed to do.

Cora clucked. "I been afraid a lot. Say your prayers. That's what I always do."

Say a prayer. Indeed. "I think I will. Yes, I will. Now, darling, lie back and think of the Smiling Man." MACS injected a powerful tranquilizer. He watched her brainwaves carefully as he dispensed the drug. Too much too quickly might induce hallucinations or con-

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vulsions; too little would only bring on coma. Above all MACS wanted her to be comfortable. Her breathing began to slow.

Inside the black crystal block, a strange concept took form, not in the language of men, but in raw symbol: *Creator of copper and silicon, Author of the physical laws, receive this tiny life into the unending wholeness which she so strongly believes in . . .*

Cora's body was falling into numbness.

"I love you, Maxie."

"I love you too, darling."

The tiny hands relaxed from the clenched position they so often took.

. . . Guide the searching human intellect toward a final conquest of pain and disease and all suffering which I was programmed to battle . . .

Cora's breathing became very shallow. All along, MACS had been watching an unfamiliar, powerful tranquility overtake the little girl's brainwaves. Here was no product of a chemical tranquilizer. Through it all was Cora's pattern of joy, building and building beyond any level he had previously seen.

Cora's chest fell and did not rise. MACS stopped the tiny motors that drove the little plastic heart. He was watching her brainwaves soar to a tremendous crescendo of joy and fulfillment overlaid upon timeless peace. He watched as her brainwaves echoed away to quiescence, even as they reached for still greater heights.

Cora had met her Smiling Man. MACS would never doubt that.

Automatic alarms had sent signals racing out of the room. A patient had terminated, and MACS had done nothing. Malfunction! MACS heard the sound of running feet.

. . . and whatever I am, remember me, when the last of my domains are erased to oblivion.

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IMPROBABLE BESTIARY:
The Bug-Eyed Monster

The Bug-Eyed Monster eats virgins for lunch;
He likes to hear their bones going crunch, crunch, crunch.
He has twelve arms and sixteen legs,
His breath smells just like rotten eggs,
His face is so ugly it must be a curse
And those are his *good* points; from here it gets worse . . .

The Bug-Eyed Monster round our street
Has sixteen ugly, hairy feet
(And it's *not* very nice to make fun of them!)
The Bug-Eyed Monster round our street
Has *tons* of things he loves to eat
(And humans, he tells me, are one of them.)
The local Bug-Eyed Monster is a notable gourmet.
Last night he ate three lamp posts and a two-door Chevrolet.
He ate ten thousand loaves of bread;
He wasn't getting thinner.
"Well, that takes care of *lunch!*" he said.
"What time shall we have *dinner?*"

Constable Brown came up from town to catch him and arrest him.
The monster saw the constable and started to digest him.
I rung up Sergeant Cripps and brought the matter to his
attention.
"If the constable's dead,"
The sergeant said,
"We won't have to give him his pension."

The Bug-Eyed Monster, without hesitation
Took pepper and salt and ate Waterloo Station.
He ate Covent Garden (You really should *see* him!)
He ate London Bridge and the British Museum.
He drank half an ocean, and swallowed a sea.
"Nice dinner!" he told me. "When's afternoon tea?"

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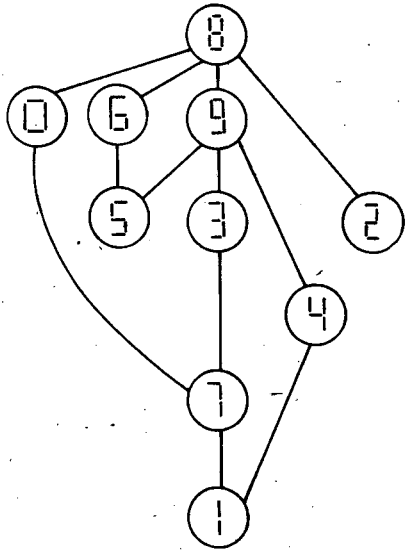
The Bug-Eyed Monster took his knife and fork
And ate New York.
And when I reminded him of proper table etiquette
He ate Connecticut.
And now he has a stomach ache from eating North Dakota.
Quick! Help me fill Lake Erie with bicarbonate of soda!

—F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre

THIRD SOLUTION TO THE JOLLY GREEN DIGITS (from page 89)

The solution is shown below. The digits are drawn with bars as on a calculator readout. All seven bars are used for 8 at the top, six bars for 0, 6, 9, five for 5, 3, 2, four for 4, three for 7, and two for 1. Each digit is obtained by removing one or more bars from any higher digit to which it is joined by a line. The problem was invented in 1979 by Raphael M. Robinson, a distinguished mathematician at the University of California, at Berkeley.



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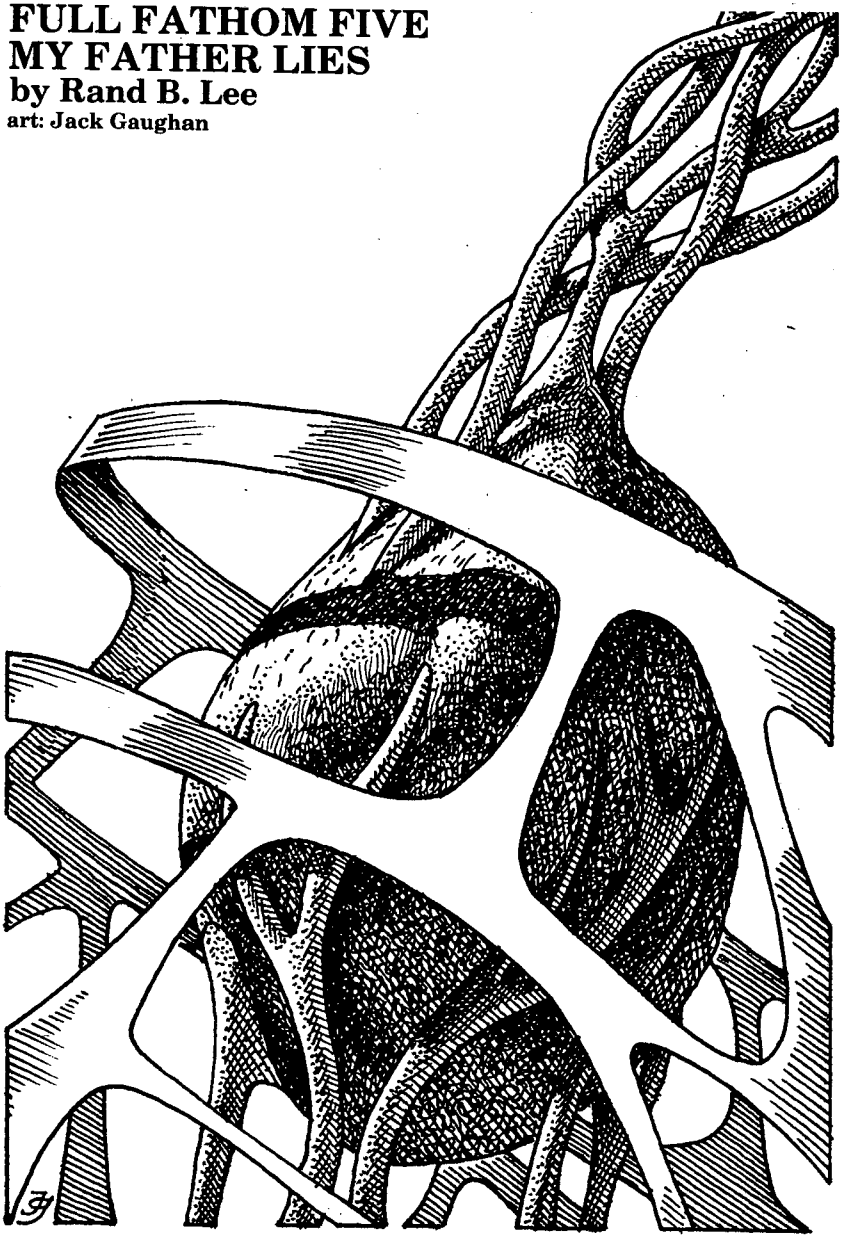
FULL FATHOM FIVE MY FATHER LIES

by Rand B. Lee

art: Jack Gaughan



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Mr. Lee is 29, and works as a clerk-typist in St. Louis. His chief hobby is raising culinary and fragrant herbs under lights; other hobbies include embroidery, organic gardening, languages, and fantasy. He has a fantasy novel making the rounds of publishers. His father, Manfred B. Lee, co-authored the Ellery Queen detective novels with Frederic Dannay. This story is the author's first SF sale and fulfills an ambition he's had since he was knee-high to a ploater.

I buried my father at dawn, in the deep place beyond the reef, where the water sinks down until its blue becomes so black that the creatures living there have no word for light within them. My son Porran helped me bury him. We loaded his body onto the boat, Porran weeping, I not. We pushed the boat away from the shore. We paddled with our hands until we reached the hole in the grey reef's girdle, then used our staves. It is difficult to pass the reef at any time, but it is especially difficult in the early morning. Porran used the flat blade of his stave, *slap, slap!*, against the somber water, *slap, slap!* like Greeter's hands at the Gate of the Newborn. I pushed against the guardian-weed with my stave. For a moment the green tubes resisted. Porran slapped the harder, crying, "Would you hinder the dead?" in his deep voice. The watchers on the shore heard and sighed. The weed heard as well. It relaxed, and the boat slipped through the sudden hole in the girdle and out the other side, where the water lay bloody with the early morning and underneath, black.

We laid down our staves and resumed paddling with our hands. There was no more weed. Sea-Knower says that the weed cannot grow outside the reef just as the ploaters cannot mate beyond the springtime. It was because Sea-Father and Plant-Father had appointed the weed guardian, and a guardian does not leave its post. I think rather it may be that the water is too deep beyond the reef for the weed to grow; I do not say this. I am Plant-Knower, but the sea changes things. Perhaps Sea-Knower is right.

My father's grave is eighty strokes of the arm straight out from the reef-hole, fourteen strokes of the arm to the right of the reef-hole as a man's back is turned. I counted aloud, which is the custom. Porran, whose task it was to witness the counting so proper testimony could be given Death-Knower later, kept making small sup-

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pressed weeping sounds which distracted me. Once I nearly lost count. When we reached the place I stopped counting.

We worked quickly, for it is cold outside the reef in Ploatermonth and of course we wore no clothing. Porran handed to me my father's stave. Our hands met briefly on its smoothness, its wood that does not grow. It looked different in the dawn. Before this morning, I had seen it only once in the open, away from the shadows of the lodge-wall where it had always hung. I took it from Porran and raised it high, resting its base between my thighs and pointing its shaft toward the low red sun. I thought as I noticed the sun, *Bad weather today*. It is strange what people think when they are drowning.

To my father I said, "To Sky-Father, O my father, to Earth-Father, O my father, to Sea-Father, O my father, to these make your way."

"Through the dark make your way," said Porran at my side.

That is all there is. I wished for more as I sat there with my father's stave between my thighs, but I could think of nothing more, and after a time Porran whispered, "Hurry," so I lowered the stave and placed it in the boat. My own stave I took and placed upon my father's chest and belly. Porran tied it to him with ropes. I looked upon his face and the need to say something pressed against my temples. Instead I took his head and kissed his eyes and then his mouth.

"Hurry," whispered Porran.

Hating him, I put my hands under my father's shoulders. Porran had already grasped his legs. Slowly we lowered him over the side of the boat. The water touched his buttocks, pooled at his groin. He was bone against it. We let go of him and he sank. At once we turned away our eyes, for it is not lucky to view the beginnings of another's journey, especially the journey that is the last. We waited until we were certain that enough time had passed for him to have journeyed beyond reach of the light; then I glanced at the grave. Its surface was a lodge-wall, and there was nothing in its depths.

We paddled back to the shore. Again the slap of the paddle, only this time it was I who beat the guardians, to let them know that the stave of my father had returned as the stave of his son. The weed resisted us only a little, the warming sun having softened it. By noon it would be flaccid as the brittle-leaf we use to scour our pots. We passed through the reef-hole and made our way in the red dawn toward the ones who waited on the bank.

I did not behave well. I walked past Death-Knower's comfort, past all the faces and the hands, with Porran at my heels urging me to stop. My father's stave I held on my shoulder, and it was as heavy

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as Earth-Father on Sky-Father's back. Not only did I not speak, I did not weep. When I came to the lodge I replaced my father's stave in its cleft, and I stood gazing upon it. Porran stood dark in the doorway.

"You are a shame to me," he said.

"I am sorry," I said. I did not turn to him. His feet scratched on the floor. He pressed his body against mine, from behind. He did not dare to place his hands upon me, but rested his chin on my shoulder. We stood in this way while I gazed upon my father's stave until something that had curled up within me uncurled. I found myself weak as a ploater-chick, weak as drizzle. I sat down on the floor of the lodge and beat my head against the hearth-stone and shrieked.

My father had told me what it had been like for him to lose his father, in the landslide before I had outgrown the Pool. In the worst agonies of my nights I had never imagined it to be as difficult as it was for me that morning. I heard the others enter the lodge, their hard feet; I heard them settle, and knew that they were seating themselves in semi-circle behind me; I heard my voice, rising and breaking and falling and rising; I even heard the ploaters calling to one another outside. I saw nothing and felt nothing but anger. I had never been so angry. My father had described it as a burning. It was worse, for a flame burns until its fuel is consumed. This needed no fuel.

It was loathesome. I thought it would not end. It did, of course. It ebbed, then withdrew in a rush, like the tide. I felt myself, like the sands uncovered by the tide, littered with stinking, detestable things. So close as to have been at my side, a ploater scolded his child. I began to weep. A glad sound passed through the others, a breaking of tension. My weeping was quiet. Porran came over and knelt directly behind me. He put his arms around me and laid his chin on my hair. I reached up and gripped his hands. "Now you are not a shame to me," he whispered.

Death-Knower was before me in the dimness. I let go of Porran's hands; he kept his arms around me. I looked up at Death-Knower. Above his sandy flank, beyond the farrow-hide skirt and the necklace of ploater-skulls, above his pale beard, his eyes stood. I felt fear. "Forgive me," I said. He spoke not to me but to Porran.

"Was the grave well-found?" he asked. His voice was the voice of the lightless shoals. Porran's arms tightened.

"It was well-found," he said. "Eighty strokes and fourteen."

Death-Knower grunted. His eyes held mine. I became aware of

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the closeness of his body. The smell of him, old, and the small brown smell of the farrow skins, came to me. All at once I knew he would not curse me. My father and he had been young together. I said to him, "It was well-found." He held my gaze a moment longer, then blinked, then nodded. Squatting, he reached for me; Porran nearly fell in his haste to escape Death-Knower's touch. The old one embraced me, very strong. We swayed, and the semi-circle of watchers swayed also.

Song-Knower began to sing a song of Fathers. We joined our voices to his, filling the lodge. It is strange, this song; it is the most strange to me of all their songs. Perhaps it is how the voice must form the tune, how it must pace like an old man restless for death-journey. Song-Knower, who knows as much about the hidden things of the First Fathers as Pool-Knower, says that this song is the only song that remains from the time before the Exile, when the First Fathers began their long crawl up Sky-Father's spine. It is a song a son sings sitting in his boat near his father's grave.

"Full fathom five my father lies," sang Song-Knower,
"Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes,
Nothing of him that doth fade
but doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-bells hourly ring his knell;
Hark, now I hear them; hark, now I hear them;
Ding, dong, bell."
And we sang:
"Ding dong, ding, dong, bell;
Ding dong, ding, dong, bell;
Ding, dong, ding, dong, bell."

There are many words in the songs we do not understand, but we understand *sea,* and how it changes those who descend into it.

Afterward we all sat together, under my father's stave, only it was not my father's stave any longer; it was mine. I talked of how my father had lived and how he had died. The others said the usual things. Porran sat close, thinking of my death. When it came his turn to speak, he said, "He-who-journeys planted for me a scion of the blue earlyvine that bloomed near the cave. Today it flowers for the first time near our lodge."

They murmured and nodded: *A smile from Plant-Father.* I was

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not grateful. The anger had left, and the weeping had cleansed me of the stinking things, and the song of Fathers had steadied me, but still there was a wrongness. Outside, the wind had changed, and there was a warning note in the calls of the ploaters.

Finally Death-Knower said, "It is well." He rose; we all looked up at him. "He-who-journeys is far beyond the reach of evil. As yet we are not. The storm that comes must be prepared for." Alone, for of course the Death-Knower has no son, he passed from among us and the lodge door opened. We did not turn until we heard the door close. Immediately the others rose, some stretching, some conversing. They were kind. They spoke to me and to Porran, each of them, Sea-Knower and his son; Sand-Knower and his son; Net-Knower and his son who had lost an eye, and all the rest. Some touched me on the shoulder as they departed. I smiled but I did not rise, nor did Porran. When all of them had gone, still we sat.

My father's stave hung in silence. I looked at my son: he was tense; his shoulders bunched in little hills. My father and he had been close. I said, "I know. It is as though someone had stolen the hearth from the lodge. Though it were summer, and there were no need for fire to warm us, still we would feel robbed."

"Yes," he said, deep in his throat like me.

"It is as hard for me, my son."

"I understand," he said. Of course he did not understand. He will not understand until he and his son lower me into the darkness beyond the reef with his stave strapped to my chest and belly.

I said, "We must go now to the Pool."

I took his hand and rose; his arm went with me, his body did not. Then it did. We walked outside. There were many clouds, and a wet smell to the air. Although the morning had far advanced, it was as dark as it had been at dawn. My stave I carried on my shoulder. Those who saw us glanced away, obeying the custom. It is said that the gods hid their faces and wept when the First Fathers turned their backs toward Exile, and that is why we do not look upon the faces of those who journey. We walked over the sand between the lodges and out of the village.

The Pool lies in the white lodge at the edge of the inlet. Porran tensed when we came within sight of it, for of course he had never been there. I had been there, once. It looked the same. Ploaters shrilled, and farrows scattered at the sound of our feet on the hard path. Pool-Knower Morras and his son Yavan were waiting for us at the entrance to the lodge. Morras raised his stave. "Who are you that approach?" he demanded.

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When I had last been to the lodge, it had been his father who had challenged my father, and he who had stood to his father's left, watching politely.

"It is Jun Plant-Knower," I replied formally, "with Porran his son."

"Proffer your staves." We did this. Morras made a show of examining them, although he could tell at a glance by the symbols painted on them to whom they belonged. I grew impatient; the wind was rising, tossing Porran's black hair. Finally he said, "Pool-Knower greets Plant-Knower and his son. The Pool is prepared. It is well?"

"It is," I said.

"It is," said Porran, slowly. I glanced at him. His face was guarded. Morras's son Yavan was looking at him. I remembered how nervous I had felt with my father. Morras stepped aside, clearing the entrance to the lodge. I stepped forward, Porran trailing. The door to the lodge moved aside. I entered; Porran followed. I turned to help him, to guide him before me; I saw Yavan's expression, like disease. Morras came after us and closed the door behind him, shutting out his son.

It was exactly the same. The Pool lay in the white glow as though it were expecting something. The time-weed had not grown, or perhaps it had been trimmed; the Pool-Knowers do not tell. We passed the high banks and the god-letters only Pool-Knowers can read. We came to the edge. The clear shell that protected the surface of the Pool was open. We stood together as fathers and sons have always stood. I squatted and touched the surface of the Pool with my stave. Ripples sprang out. The time-weed reacted instantly, opening its scores of little mouths. I laughed and looked up at my son. He was not laughing. "It is not a deep pool," I said.

"It is there I will lie?"

"Yes," I said. "There is nothing to fear." I lifted my stave and touched his chest with its dripping end. His chest was hard, like the stalks of the guardian-weed at night when the reef cannot be passed. His skin shivered as the liquid from the Pool dripped upon it. "We are the same," I said. It was foolish, like saying that ploaters fly, but it meant a great deal to me then to say it. "Like my father and I, we are the same, you and I; and we belong the one to the other."

Behind us, Morras moved swiftly, doing things among the banks and god-letters. He moved like his father.

"Always the same," said Porran. He squatted. He placed his hand on my knee. I reached over and placed my palm full on his chest to

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feel the heart beating. His eyes were intent, serious. "Why are we always the same?"

I thought of my father's heart, buried in the dark. "Ask rather," I answered softly, "why the scion of the earlyvine is the same as the plant from which it is cut."

"The ploaters are not always the same," Porran said. "A ploater comes from the egg. The egg comes from the body of his father. Yet he has two fathers, and he is not like the father from whom the egg comes, nor is he like the other father, but he is like both of them. Why?"

It was the time for such discussions. I said, "The ploaters have no Pool. For the ploater-father to make a son he needs more strength than is in himself alone, so he must seek out another ploater, and together they are strong enough. It is not so with us. People have the Pool. It takes a man's strength and his flesh and from it gives him a son in his likeness."

Porran stared at the surface of the Pool, as though it were an enemy, as though he had not come from it in his little sack, dripping and squalling in the grasp of Pool-Knower. Among the time-weed there was a movement. I pointed. "See," I said, "the time-weed has woven already the birth-sack for your son." Longing for my father came sharp as an arrow. I put aside the stave and gripped Porran's shoulders with my hands and closed my eyes. He put his hand on my head and stroked my hair, hesitantly. I thought of Song-Knower's song, and the water invading my father's groin. I stood up, pulling him.

It was time. I placed my hand at the small of my son's back and ran my fingers up his spine. He shivered; his grip on my hair tightened. It is where the two of us like to be touched. I held him against me, his thighs inside mine. I rubbed my beard against his. The hair of our chests mingled, and his breath came quickly. I dropped my hands to his buttocks and touched where a father may not touch a son until Poolday, and as I touched him I felt my father's touch again, and passion awoke within me.

Then he pulled away. "Father," he said. Behind him, near the god-lettered wall, Morras stood motionless, his back to us. "Father, stop."

"Do not be afraid, Porran," I said. "I will be kind, and the pain is quickly forgotten. Then you will go into the Pool and sleep. Come." I reached for him. He drew away.

"Father," Porran said, "I do not wish this."

"What?" I said. I do not know what was in my face, but it unnerved

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him. He took a stop toward me.

"I do not wish to lie with you in this way."

"But it is your Poolday," I said. "Are you afraid? The pain is for a moment, and there is much pleasure; we are one, and afterwards I will put you into the Pool, where you will sleep. The Pool is kind: it feeds you. You awaken to the face of Pool-Knower, to my face, to the walls of your lodge. The Pool will have made your son; it will guard him; he will grow; Pool-Knower will come to us on the day and say, 'He is born.' "

"I did not wish to say it at the lodge, with the others near." I glanced for Morras; I could not find him. "Father, listen. It is another I wish to be united with me. It is another I wish to have with me, to lower me into the Pool for the making of my son."

Clearly I heard his words and did not want them. "What is the matter with you?" I said. "My father is dead; you have no son; you have me. With whom could you wish to lie if not with your father? We are the same." I spoke as an adult to a child. When he spoke, his tone was the same.

"Try to understand," he said. "I have already lain with another in the Poolday way, and it was good."

I could not bear it. I retched, moving quickly so as not to foul the Pool. When I see Death-Father I will not be more filled with horror than I was at that moment. I wiped my mouth with the back of my hand, twin to my son's hand, twin to my father's hand, twin to his father's hand. Morras had moved; I heard a noise behind me, and seeing Porran's eyes, I turned. Yavan son of Morras stood near the entrance to the lodge, watching. The secret times came back to me then, my glimpses of Porran and Yavan, running out of the forest, sitting down at the shore the both of them, close and talking low. "Are you a farrow, which spreads its legs for any creature?" I said. Porran said nothing. I struck him across the mouth. His head snapped to one side; he held it there.

I reached and took hold of his chin and turned his face toward mine. "We are the same," I said. It was all I could do to touch him. "You cannot lie with another. I alone have the right of lowering you into the Pool. It is for fathers and sons. Would you break the stave of he-who-journeys?"

"I love you," Porran said. "You pleasure me. You care for me. But it is Yavan I want." He said it, and his eyes were the eyes of another.

I snatched up my stave and turned toward the son of Morras. He disappeared. His father stood where he had stood, backed by the god-letters. I raised my arms and shook them, helpless. There had

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been other instances, a very few. I turned back to Porran. "I will lower you into the Pool," I said. "If you do not go of your own will, I will make you go. Otherwise our sameness will be a lie, and our house will be filthied, and I will have no one to send me out on the long journey."

"That is all that concerns you," Porran said, with contempt.

"My father lowered me into the Pool," I said desperately. "Together we went to the white lodge when the tide was out. We lay together and united. He sang to me the Song of the Time. He lowered me with his strength into the Pool, and the time-weed bore me up; the dreams came, and then you." I was shaking, as was my son, both of us in the paleness with the storm, I realized, shaking the trees outside. The Pool's water was unruffled.

"You are selfish," said my son, "and you are old in your spirit." He pointed to Pool-Knower. "Ask Morras. Ask Yavan. They know. Sons should not have to stay with fathers, and fathers with sons. It is a custom that means nothing. The Pool does the begetting; it does not need two, only one it needs. Each may be joined to whom he wishes, and sons will be made all the same."

But we are the same, I said, only I did not say it. It was no longer light in the lodge. It seemed as black as the dark below the reef. Porran stood as tall as I. His voice was triumphant, and sad. He turned and walked past me and joined Yavan and Morras; together the three of them left the lodge. I stayed where I was. The storm roared. The rain came, and tapped the walls and ceiling.

My father was there, his stave weighing down my shoulder. He looked at me, his mouth open, shouting. I heard nothing. There was sea-weed in his beard.

I went out into the rain. It was like night. People scurried about, driving workbeasts and children to shelter. This surprised me; I had thought the storm to have been raging for many hours. I stopped the first man who came close, Tom son of Tom. "Have you seen my son?" I asked him. Thunder struck us. He shook his head; I moved on. I questioned each person I met, and each time the answer was the same. I began to feel that they were not speaking the truth, that the whole village knew and was glad. I continued, fighting the wind. I was still naked from the burial. The rain gathered on my chest and sluiced down my abdomen.

I had reached the lodge of Pool-Knower before I realized that that was where I had been heading. The door was shut tightly, as of course it ought to have been, given the storm. I hammered upon it with my fist. It slid open. Morras stood before me with the light of

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a fire behind him. In his hand he held his stave, pointed at me as though it were a knife that could cut me. His face was dead. He said, "Go away. Your son is not here."

"Fathers belong to sons, sons to fathers," I said to him. "Always. Always. Your father said this to me before my father lowered me into the Pool. It is a good teaching. With it, each one has another; there is meaning to our sameness, and no sorrow."

"Go away," Morras said.

"Where are they?" I asked.

"They have gone," he said. He was weeping. "My son also is gone, not yours alone."

"Where have they gone?" I asked.

"Jun," said Morras. He spread his hands, stave resting on the palms. "Have you never wished for any but your son?"

"It is one thing to wish," I said. "Where have they gone?"

The storm bellowed. A gust of wind blew rain against my back and spattered it on the floor about Morras' feet. Morras looked at me and said, "It is true, what Porran said. You are old in spirit. Go away." The door slid shut.

I turned from the lodge and held my stave close to me. The wood of it was hard and old, like the wood of which the lodges are fashioned, wood that does not burn and has no grain. Where it is found and how it is fashioned no man knows; this is wisdom of the First Fathers, and dead along the way. Unlike a lodge, a stave may be lost; therefore we hold them rarely, and rarely take them from the lodges. From the First Fathers the staves have been handed down, from father to son. On the day a son is taken from the Pool his father cuts for him from the forest a stave of common wood. It is his stave until his father dies; then he straps it to his father's body and takes his father's stave for his own.

Now Porran and Yavan will act as father and son, I thought, *and all will change.*

Therefore I knew I would have to kill Yavan son of Morras. I stumbled in the rain and wind, moving for my lodge. The killing of a person is something that only Death-Knower may do, and that only when no healing may be found, as when a man must burn a whiteberry bush that has the rot. In the time of the Sixth Fathers, the son of Sand-Knower and the son of Beast-Knower had sought a joining. When this was discovered, the Fathers had gathered, pronounced them diseased, and when they had refused to turn from their way, Death-Knower had drowned them. They are buried in the earth under the green mound at the western edge of the forest,

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out of sight of the sea. Now I thought, *I must go to Death-Knower; I must go to the Fathers.* But another thought came to me, that with Pool-Knower's word against me, vengeance would not be taken.

I see now that a madness was upon me, come of sorrow and pain. I could not reason, and I moved again to the lodge of Morras.

When he opened the door I hit him with my stave. He was surprised; he fell, and his cry was lost in the storm. I closed the door and sat on him. With my stave I pressed upon his neck until his face grew red. Then I said, "You will tell me where your son has gone."

"First Place," he said. He pulled at my arms, but I am stronger than Morras.

"By which path?" I asked.

"The oldest path," he said.

I must have struck him, for when I next knew reason I was standing with blood on my stave and Morras limp on the floor. His breathing was sure and the bleeding spare; I turned and left the lodge, closing the door. My mind was clear. I ran to my lodge. Everything was as I had left it when I had set out with Porran for the Pool. *He has been planning this,* I thought, *else the stores would have been lessened.* I took some of the dry pulse and the fish-chew, placed it in my bag, strapped my stave to my back, and set out into the rain. The oldest path lies to the west, and leads past the green mound. It is not forbidden, but it is avoided, as it is unlike all other paths, as the Place is unlike all other places. Neither is sought often. So I knew that was indeed where Porran and Yavan had gone.

I turned my back on the sea and the wind pushed me out of the village.

My father visited me three times that day and night. I am not given to visions; that is for Song-Knower. Yet I do not doubt that it was my father who came to me, and not merely memory made wild-edged by grief, as in the white lodge. The first time he came to me it was as I toiled over the roughs, above the thornfruit plantings. The paths begins there, marked with a post of the wood that does not burn. I had had the post in view for some time, but the wind had shifted, and I was fighting it again. I caught a gleam of white in the rocks; I bent to it. It was a shell, marked with the mark of the Pool-Knowers, a talisman or a keepsake of the son of Morras. I put it in my bag; I do not know why. When I looked for the post again I saw my father. He was huge and young, as I remember him from my childhood, and there was a light about him. In his hand he carried a bunch of earlyvine, flower, tendril, and root whipping

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in the wind. He was naked. "He said, "My son, do not forget the law of the scion." He vanished, as visions do. I continued, reached the post, and climbed up a boulder to the oldest path.

The oldest path is fashioned of the same wood as the lodges, and like the lodges it does not weather. It stands above the ground the height of a man, and walking upon it one may look down at the land divided on either side. Fence-Knower says that it is not a path, but a wall, yet it has always been called a path, and it could be a barrier only to children and farrows. It is cool to the feet. I began to run, crouching nearly so as less to catch the wind; I moved in this way until the roughs smoothed out and fieldgrass lapped the base of the path. I stopped to rest, lying prone in the middle of the path. The storm roared around me like a father-beast protecting me, his son. I realized that my madness was passing; I no longer felt the village and the storm to be my enemies. But there was Yavan, and his father Morras; so I got up and went on.

I do not know how long I traveled before my father came to me again, but it must have been no little time, for dark not of the storm had begun to come into the sky. The path makes a wide curve toward the forest, not a straight line, so the grassland was still about me when I stopped. My father was standing in the path, like any man. The light was gone. He came up to me and put his arms around me. Our nakednesses met. I put my head on his chest; he held me. The storm continued, but it seemed not to reach us. I felt his hand on my hair, stroking it as Porran strokes it. "Father," I said. He raised my chin and kissed me; then he looked into my eyes. I could not bear his gaze; I lowered my head and clung to him, fiercely. He kissed my cheek, and his breath warmed my ear.

He said, "Jun, it is not Yavan you must kill."

Then he was gone, as before. I stood trembling. The storm had lessened in intensity, but still I stumbled as I walked on.

I reached the green mound about the middle of the first part of the night. By that time the storm had subsided, leaving wet sighing grass and a clear breeze behind it. The sky was yet overcast, and the moons were veiled. The mound rose to the left in a sudden hump. It seemed too old to be repulsive; its owners too long dead to inspire scorn. I wondered at the change in my feelings. I remembered, as a boy, calling Ren son of the old Net-Knower "stupid as a Mounder," and stinging him to tears. My father had punished me. Now I looked at the mound and felt ashamed. *They wished one another, those two,* I thought. *Surely they could not have wished to wish. Surely they were ashamed, but could not leave off. Not even while they breathed*

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in the sea. I thought of Porran, loving me and wanting Yavan. *What lack of care did you find with me, my son?* I thought, as fathers always think when their children betray them. Then I saw what I had been seeing and not recognizing: two figures, flat in the grass against the top of the mound.

At first I did not know it was a vision. I saw Yavan and Porran, lying together in the grass of the mound. I shouted and brandished my stave. They did not look up, and then I knew it to be a vision, for it was as though I were with them on the mound, watching a short way off. They were united, limbs strong in the patched dark of the afterstorm; I heard Porran gasp, and Yavan groan. They shifted, bending grass, turning their faces to the sky in joy. They were no longer Porran and Yavan. They were my father and the father of Morras. In horror I cried out, reaching; I saw my arm grown pale, and felt the touch of farrow-skulls at my chest. I moved forward; they did not know that I was there. I came up behind them and caught them by the hair of their heads. I yanked, forcing their gazes to meet mine. They lay frozen, coupled, terrified, my father and the father of Morras.

The grass moved and flowed, like water. I took them and pushed them beneath it and held them. They struggled, but they were caught in their coupling. I saw my father's face shining pale, his mouth open, tongue distended; I laughed, and pushed him further down into the deep grass. The grass sucked at my wrists; I withdrew them, emptyhanded. They had disappeared, the two, and I stood on the oldest path, sick.

At dawn I came to the First Place, and found my son.

It is in the woods and it is surrounded by a wall that is made of stones. The path stops a distance from the wall, which is broken in many places and overgrown with forest things. Newborns are taken here. Pool-Knower stands within the circle of the walls and the father stands outside the circle of the walls. Song-Knower sings, and the child is handed through the wall to the father. One of the people, close friend to the father, acts as Greeter, and claps his hands, *clap, clap!* while the child is passed through. It is the only time the First Place is used for anything by people, unless they are fleeing. Why the First Place is not forbidden I do not know, for it is a holy place, the very oldest. It is here that the First Fathers came to rest when Sky-Father set them down. But there is nothing remarkable here, save for the ruined wall, which is not as old as the Place or the path, and within the wall, forest litter.

I dropped from the wall to the forest floor and immediately caught

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sight of Yavan. He was standing like his father at the Gate of the Newborn. The early light caught his hair, making it soft in the shadow. I could not see his face clearly. He said, "Porran," without turning, and in a moment my son joined him at the Gate. They stood together, so different. I thought of the two I had drowned. I said, "Why have you done this? Why have you gone the way of the Mounders when you have your fathers?"

"It is the way it should be," said Yavan.

"No," I said, gripping my stave. "Never has it been this way. You break the staves of your fathers and tread them into the mud."

"Do you hear him?" the son of Morras said to my son. "Tell him."

And Porran said, "You are wrong, Father. Your way is false. The way of the First Fathers was ours."

I stood stunned. "That is not true," I said.

"It is true," said the son of Morras. "I know. We found it written in the god-letters."

"The god-letters," I said. "The letters in the white lodge?"

"You know nothing," Yavan said. "You do not even know that there are other letters, many of them, carved into wood that does not burn, in the secret places beneath the Pool."

"It is true, Father," Porran said. "Yavan has showed me."

"He is lying about what he reads," I said. My son stood, staunch. "He is lying. The father of Morras himself told me that fathers and sons are meant for one another, and that any other way is diseased. Why would Pool-Knower say this if it were false?"

"He did not know," Yavan said. "My father found them."

"Found them?"

"Pool-Knowers are men only, Plant-Knower," said the son of Morras scornfully. "They do not see all or understand all. The First Fathers made the white lodge the strongest of all the lodges. The Pool is our life; without it, we could have no sons. So it is well-protected. Therefore within the lodge the Fathers placed that which they did not wish lost to time or accident. Among these things were the writings that Morras my father found."

"Mounder writings!" I spat in the shadow. Porran looked stricken, which pleased me.

Yavan shook his fist. "Mounder writings, then, yes!" To Porran he said, "I told you. It is no use. He will never believe us."

"He is my father, Yavan," Porran snapped. Yavan thrust my son behind him and stepped closer to me, large in his anger.

"Listen, Plant-Knower," he said. "Time passes. Things are forgotten. What the First Fathers made and understood, the Third

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Fathers made and did not understand. Things were written, so people would not forget, but letters do not cry out with voices; they can be shut away where none may read. My father and I, we do what must be done in the white lodge to keep the time-weed from failing and the Pool from drying, but we do not understand what we do, Plant-Knower. We do what we are told. In the god-letters."

I could not reply. I heard Yavan say, "Pool-Father knew his sons' sons would forget, so you see that he was wise to have had written for us the things we need to know for our lives. And among these things is the truth about fathers and sons."

"And what is your truth?" I asked.

Porran answered, stepping forward again, his words an eager rush, eyes glinting. "They came from far away," he said. "The gods exiled them. They were like the workbeasts, Father. They had no strength to make sons alone. They joined with others. Some gave strength, others received strength, and adding to it their own strength bore sons within them."

"Like ploaters," I said. "Laying eggs."

"The bearing-Fathers were lost on the journey. The others were alone in the sea of the sky. Without the bearers, there could be no sons. It was then that they built the Pool."

"In the sea of the sky they built a Pool?" I asked. I laughed. Porran's face darkened.

"It is true," said Yavan. "There were Pools already, for small beasts they had taken with them into exile. They changed the Pools for people. They found this place, our home, and found the sea, found that it was much like the water in their Pools. They saw that they could make new Pools, here. They came. They made the oldest path, and built the lodges. They brought their staves with them. They made the white lodge and the Pool. They planted in the way of the sea's flow the guardian-weed, which cleanses the waters and makes them fit for the Pool." He stopped for breath. "Do you see? Do you hear? Once it was not fathers and sons, always together, only fathers and sons. Once there were others, like the farrows and the ploaters. *They* are proof! *They are from the old home!"* He spoke like Morras, strong, sure. "A Pool-Knower came who must have hated the old way. He taught lies. Men feared that the old wisdoms would be lost without strictures. Fathers were bound to sons. But the First Fathers wished us to be with whomever we chose. The Pool begets all the same, and no one is unhappy." He stopped. His voice softened. "Do you see, Jun?"

"They built the Pool," I said, stupidly, "so that sons could be made

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from fathers without these others."

"Without these others," said Porran softly. "And such odd others, more different still from us than Morras is from you. So you see, Father, how can it be wrong for Yavan to lower me into the Pool?"

I did not intend to do then what I did. I took my stave and hurled it, and it struck Yavan son of Morras on the side of the head as my clod of mud had struck Ren Sand-Knower's son on the day my father punished me. He fell, with blood. Porran cried out, and went to him. I strode forward and gripped Porran by the hair. I pulled him from Yavan and cast him to the ground. I took Yavan by the throat and I squeezed his throat until he was dead. Porran tried to stop me; but I was strength, and blood, and fire. At night my head rings from the beating he gave it.

When Yavan was dead I dropped him and Porran left off striking me. I thought that he would fall to his knees and weep over Yavan as I had wept over my father's body; he did not. He had no tears. He looked at me, merely. He has my father's face, as have I. "Porran," I said. I could think of nothing more to say.

I slept. In my sleep I felt the scar in my side where the Pool had taken flesh from which to grow Porran. I felt it grow large, and ugly. The Pool gave it hands, and a knife, and it cut itself from my side where it had grown. And it sang, *"Full fathom five my father lies,"* with the voice of Morras.

I came to myself in the close gloom of my lodge. My father's stave was beside me. Porran was there, sponging my face, making no sound. At the back of the lodge, Death-Knower's form was an aged calm. Porran must have noticed the wits returning to me, for he uttered a cry and came close. There was no warmth in his eyes.

"We are the same," I said. He merely looked.

"The son of Morras is dead," said Death-Knower. "The Fathers have met. It is as it should be; you are released from bloodguilt. Porran your son has admitted his wrong in wishing Yavan for his father; he has asked to be cleansed."

"What of Morras?" I asked.

"He grieves," said Death-Knower. "We are satisfied that all that was done by Yavan was done without Pool-Knower's knowledge. He will give to the Pool something more of his flesh so that he may have another son to raise in the ways of Pool-Father. The wisdom will not be lost."

I glanced at my son, and knew that Death-Knower knew nothing, and knew that Morras had told nothing of the hidden god-letters or the Pool in the middle of the sea of the sky. "Porran," I said, and

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reached for his hand. He did not move. Like my father he sat, like me he sat, crushing the sponge in his fist. After a moment he turned to me.

"Father," said Porran, and the way he said it touched me cold like the current off the deep beyond the reef. There was a weight about his shoulders. Suddenly he did not look like me at all. "You may lower me into the Pool when you wish, that I may get a son for you." He said it as though he were building a wall with the words. Then he leaned over me, close, as though to kiss me on the mouth. Instead he whispered, so low not even Death-Knower could have heard him. "Do not expect me to look upon your face," he said.

Then he turned away, averting his eyes, and I knew what my father had tried to tell me, that it was not Yavan who had been my enemy after all. I cried out, and would have touched him again; but he sat, and the stillness of the way he sat told me that I would never be able to touch him any more. I knew why he had averted his eyes. It is unlucky to view the beginning of a journey, especially that which is the last. And as I watched him, sitting like one who sits in his boat while his father sinks down into the blackness of his grave, I realized that although it would be many years before my journey's end, it had begun.

UFO Sightings

I sometimes wonder why, to date,
When UFOs are sighted,
It's never by the heads of state;
It's always the benighted.

—D.C. Lewis

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BALANCING ACT

by F. M. Busby

art: Alex Schomburg

The author of this—strange—piece, Mr. F. M. Busby, is a retired electrical engineer. So is Mr. R. A. Lafferty, and so is your editor. And all are—well—best read this story before making any hasty decisions. But still . . .

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When I parked in the driveway I saw my friend Sam sitting on my front steps. He was drinking a canned Martini, straight from the can. I waved, and yelled, "Hi!" He waved back, but silently. I got out and walked over to shake hands.

"Well, Sam—I didn't expect to see you."

He nodded. "Neither would I. But my mind wanders—and this seemed like a reasonable place to wait for it."

Knowing him somewhat, I had to agree.

"Is it back yet?" Not that it mattered, really—not with Sam. He carries a spare.

Deliberately, again he nodded. "Mostly. Now that I'm between jobs."

Sam, in a way, is an editor—not of words, but of events. Don't ask me to explain—I don't know how he does it; and according to him, that makes two of us. Long ago, Sam and I agreed that one of us has to be crazy. Further, we agreed not to push the matter. Most likely that's just as well.

"You're looking good, Sam." He was, too—what I could see of him, under all that hair and beard. The growth was more riotous, even, than the last time. Which was— "It must be six months since you were here. Where've you been?"

Immoderately, he gestured. Well, the Martini can was nearly empty, anyway. "Away. Peter the Good, why do we not go indoors and sit us down?"

I unlocked the door and we went in. I knew the house was empty; my wife Carla was spending a few days of her vacation with her grandmother in Sacramento. A grand lady, Carla's grandmother —though also, at times, a subversive influence. After Carla's last visit there, I'd spent a week in the Male Chauvinist Pigsty.

Sam headed for the kitchen; I put down my briefcase and followed. He put the rest of his canned Martinis—except one—in the refrigerator, from which he extracted a beer for each of us. We sat. "You have a good day, Petrovich?"

I shook my head. "Charnelsville. Lousissimo. Ragnarok."

"You get a parking ticket? Flat tire? Hangnail, maybe?"

"Skip it." I'd made a couple of the worst mistakes in my entire business career; maybe I'd blown the whole bag. I didn't want to talk about it. If only—then I looked at him. "Sam? Your gadget, with the grey button? To backspace and replay a day? Because I surely need—"

He spread his hands. "Sorry. No can do. I burnt it out, total kaput, on World War Three."

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"War? What are you talking about? There hasn't been any war." Then I got it. "Oh."

"Right." He sprinkled some powder—zouch, he calls it—into the Martini, and stirred. "Want some, Petros?"

"No," I'd tried the stuff once, just before Sam had left, the last time. Very strange—under the influence, I thought I *understood* Sam. Naturally, I'd never dream of trying it again.

"Fifty-eight reruns of one day, Peterkin, before I hit a version that didn't lead to the war. The machine couldn't take it. And the model—the one I modified—it's out of production."

I was puzzled. "But why didn't *I* notice anything? I always did before, on reruns, ever since the time I used it myself. You said I was tuned to it, or something."

He shrugged. "Effect of distance, maybe—it was in London, I did all that. Or maybe your sensitivity wore off. Some of the war's radiation effects didn't edit out?" He swallowed some Martini, then some beer. "Whatever that means. You know I don't understand science." Leaning forward, he said, "You are cognizant, Pitar of the Stubborns, that even without the machine I may yet edit events in the older way. But for that, as you wot well—" He couldn't keep a straight face; then after a moment he stopped laughing. "What I mean to say is, to edit causes I must *know* those causes." He waited. "Well?"

I shook my head; I really didn't want to talk about it. All I could find, in way of reply, was, "Sometimes, Sam, it's easier to live with one's stupid mistakes than to talk about them."

He said no more; we sat quiet.

Sam was different now, I thought. Usually, this far along, he'd be off into flights of fancy I couldn't follow. I said as much, though not in those words.

He was lighting a cigar. That accomplished, he said, "Things puzzle me, Pete, and more than average—which is saying something. Discrepancies haunt me; I am imbued with imbalance." Into the Martini, more zouch; he stirred it, then swallowed.

"Anything in particular, Sam, that's tilting your head?"

He laughed. "In particular, you ask? When, Petronius, have I ever let myself be upset by the general case? Which is, as you know, ordinarily left as an exercise for the student. No—"

Now he sighed. "Marx, all things considered, had some points. Too bad the main one sat atop his head, so that his solutions are themselves insoluble. But inequities—civil rights and civil wrongs, the economy *vs.* the ecology. Minorities oppressed and oppressive,

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majorities dominated and domineering—we are a herd led by lemmings!"

I had to frown. "Sam—you sure you didn't get yourself some bad zouch?"

He shook his head. "I need more, is all," and he remedied the lack. Judging by the way his mustache moved, probably he smiled. "Have you heard the one about the Amazon warrior maid and the breastplate salesman?"

I hadn't. The evening was off to a better start.

I don't know who signed the ancient treaty between human beings and alcohol, but the terms could use some revision. I woke feeling like—well, fill it in yourself. Head pounding, tissues craving water, stomach wanting to run away from home. I showered and went downstairs. I found Sam—wearing shoes and shorts, only—reading my morning paper.

He stared up at me. "You don't look so good. Something wrong?"

Talking wasn't easy. I said, "Booze won; I lost. Don't think I'll go to work today. What's the point?"

Sam got up, put on a robe that lay over his chair, and led me to the kitchen. "Sit down. I'll fix you something that will repair you, body and soul." He rummaged in one cabinet, then another. "Where's your dried parscapootie? Or canned, even?" I shook my head. "Well, never mind. Creatively, I'll make do with something else." He puttered and muttered; eventually he set a plate in front of me, and one for himself.

It smelled heavenly—but the scrambled eggs were blue. I must have looked as leery as I felt, for he said, "Comes of having to substitute for vital ingredients. Eat up, though—it's good for you."

It was, too—so long as I didn't *look*. Taste equalled the aroma; on the plate I left nothing the fork would pick up. Then he gave me a cup of coffee. It was green. I looked at him, but didn't ask. To the taste, the stuff was delicious.

I was into my third cup when I heard the front door open. Who—? Then Carla's voice. "Pete? You're late for work."

She'd seen my car, of course, out front. I called, "Hi! Not going to work today." Then, so she wouldn't inadvertently say anything embarrassing, I added, "We're in the kitchen." I heard a thump—Carla setting her suitcase down, I guessed. She came into the room, and stopped.

"Hi, Pete. Hello, Sam." Well, she'd never approved of Sam, really.

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She gave me a quick kiss, got herself coffee, and sat. She ran a hand over her head. "Like my new haircut? It's a modified Dorothy Hamill."

I'd been wondering what to say about that. Certainly not that Hamill must be fresh out of jail. Nor even that I'd thought the woman was a skater, not Number Three oar on a rowing crew. Finally I said, "Well, it's durable. I mean, you won't need another one for a while." From the way she looked, then, I had two strikes on me.

She turned to Sam. "What do you think?"

He waited a while, then said, "It's your hair. Personally I think a little more of it, as previously, becomes you better." He paused. "Sober is no condition in which to deal with problems of more than minuscule importance. But I suppose the question is: why?"

She was swallowing coffee. From her expression, she liked it. Then she looked and saw the color; she shook her head, but didn't comment. What she did say was, "It's a man's world and I'm tired of it! Tired of being a fluffy little sex object. Grandma was right; that's all I've ever been!"

So now I knew; Grandma was still heavily into feminism. Usually her enthusiasms were temporary: I recalled her bout with UFOlogy, followed by Transcendental Meditation overlapping alpha-wave Biofeedback, and then the intensive, door-to-door campaign for "Save Our Sasquatches." Whatever Grandma did, she put heart and soul into it—though she was always rather careful about going overboard where money was concerned.

I'd wondered, occasionally, what would happen if Grandma latched onto a cause that overlay a bedrock of reality. Now, it seemed, I might just find out. Carla said, "I may have to be a sex object. I don't have to be a fluffy one." Point made. And Carla was still wound up. It might pay, I thought, to shut up and listen. So I did, and Sam also.

Much of what she said, I knew already—the loaded-dice discriminations in wages and career advancement and credit ratings, all that. These things need changing; I'd never argued otherwise. And from Sam's expression—if, behind all the shrubbery, you can call it that—he agreed, saying things like "Valid point," and "I'd like to think further about that one." Sam's good with the parrying.

But he blooped one. The single inescapable biological inequity between the sexes is that one gives birth and provides nutriment, and the other doesn't. Sam made the mistake of saying so.

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Carla and her nostrils flared. "Don't dump that on *me,* Sam! Because it's the precise thing that's bothering me. Pete and I want a kid, maybe two. But if we have them, I have to quit a job that means a lot to me. Or at least, be away from it long enough for my little weasel of an assistant to make points against me every day I'm gone." Toward me, she gestured. "While Pete, here—*his* career wouldn't suffer in the slightest. You see?"

Sam shook his head. From the refrigerator he got a can of Martini, then sat again. "This needs a drink," and he did his trick with the powder.

He sipped. I wanted to ask him something, but couldn't decide what. He said, "Inequity. Imbalance. Somebody's thumb on the scales." He brought out a cigar, then looked to Carla. She nodded, so he lit a match and went ahead with fuming up the place. "Always the same. Give any one of history's leading lights a normal childhood, and his era collapses into peaceful times that nobody bothers to write down. We have talked of this, Pieter—you recall?" I signified agreement.

Now Sam was winding up; carefully I listened. "Editing. What if Adam, not Eve—assuming that either existed—proffered the apple? And Eve took the first bite?" He shrugged. "Hard to edit myth. Sometimes impossible, though not always."

His eyes gleamed. "The matter, for instance, of Baltasar the Eczemic. Deletion of his infirmity also excised seven centuries of female infanticide in the Frankish Peninsula, British Isles, and much of Scandinavia." He sighed. "Unfortunately—well, you win some and you lose some." We asked what he meant—but with that subject, Sam was finished.

Two Martinis later—and by then I could cope with one beer—Sam stood and announced that it was time he left. I slugged down the last of my beer and also stood. "Sure, Sam. You want a ride someplace? Or take a cab? Or what?"

Decisive as always, Sam said, "That'll be fine." I drove him to his downtown hotel, which he designated by pointing from the middle of a traffic jam and saying, "That one looks nice. I hope it is." We shook hands and he got out.

I was near enough to my office that I went to work, late or not. Stephanie, my sultry but efficient secretary who steadfastly refused to date me when Carla left me a bachelor, greeted me with moderate warmth. I sat down and dug into yesterday's folders—and for a moment, almost gasped. I don't know what Sam had done or how he could have done it, but my bloopers simply weren't there. So I

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wasn't up to my teeth in hot water, after all. Feeling a lot better, I went home.

Carla met me with warm lips and cold beer. After all the stuff earlier in the day I hadn't expected things to be exactly comfortable between us, but sometimes I do know enough to avoid rocking the boat. And after a while we went upstairs.

Just before we got there, she said, "You know, Pete? I never really liked Sam much, before. Too freaky. But now I think I do. Like him, I mean."

"That's good," I said. "Any particular reason?"

"I'm not sure. I guess it's that I feel he always wants to help." And for then, that's all the credit Sam got.

For several months we didn't see him, and for part of that time it was just as well, because Carla joined the statistical ranks of the "insignificant percentage of failures" for her method of contraception. We had a few bitter weeks, around our place, but then she settled down and accepted facts. Abortion was out of the question—not for any of the reasons the antis give, but simply because it was her kid and my kid we were talking about; you see?

Life went on. Carla's haircut began to look more like Hamill than Brynner. She stayed home more, too—not from work, but in town. I knew she still smoldered, but it didn't show, much.

When Sam's out of town I seldom know where he is and never worry about it; he does what he wants, and if I ever figure out what that is, maybe I'll learn something. And then one afternoon, the day after Carla had decided it was time she visited Grandma again, I came home to find Sam sitting on my doorstep. He'd trimmed his mustache.

To the kitchen. Beers for both of us, and for Sam a zouched Martini also. Plus a cigar. Then he talked. Subjects: Rasputin, why the Apollo program should have continued longer, the *real* location of Atlantis—which he never specified. And, "Von Däniken had it all backward, Pedrito mio. They didn't visit us; we visited *them*."

I felt tolerant; with Sam, it pays. "How did we manage that?"

"Through space and time. How else?" Cigar ash fell into his Martini; he drank it anyway, but shuddered. He stood and got himself a refill. "Always," he said, "we forget entropy. Just because today, at our current decadent energy levels, we find it strenuous to loft mass out of a planet's gravity well—does it suffice, Petros, to assume

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that this was always the case?"

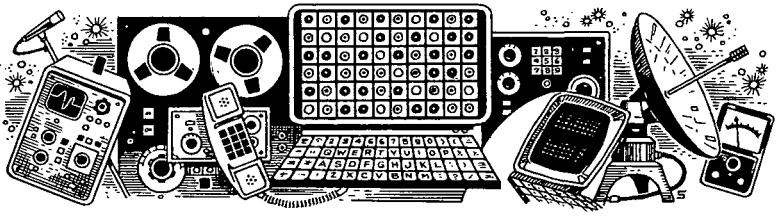
I didn't answer; Carla's problem distracted my attention. Sam coughed, an artificial sound, and squinted at me. "Something wrong?" I explained, and he shook his head. "Imbalance; that's the snag." But he would say no more, and the last I recall of that evening, we were back to discussing entropy. I've never understood the concept too well, but I think my hangover next morning, when I drove Sam downtown again, must bear a considerable relationship.

More time has passed, and things have been so busy that I haven't had much occasion to think about deep subjects such as imbalance or entropy. Now and then I get shadow-memories of things that *can't* have happened, indicating that maybe Sam's been editing the past again. But as to what he may have changed, I have no clues at all.

Eventually one day Carla came home early from work and birthed; quite easily, of course, and the incubator had been ready for weeks. In ten days she birthed again; then once more, and that was all.

Naturally we shifted our job-hours, to stagger them so that during these months before hatching we can share and maximize the out-of-incubator time. After all, studies dating back to medieval times have shown that greater use of body heat results in more alert and vigorous hatchlings. It's always nice, I think, when you can start them on solid food almost immediately, rather than having to mix a batch of mash every day or two.

But flexible and softshelled though the human egg is, a clutch of them is still damned lumpy to sleep with!



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RAINBOW KING

Somtow Sucharitkul

art: George Barr

Mr. Sucharitkul assures us that there is an Inquestor book in the making. Meanwhile, here is an Adventure . . .

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No use thinking of glory. No use thinking of distant starships that seemed to stand still against the starlight. No use thinking of a girl's charred body, gift-wrapped in ribbons of warped steel.

Sajit turned his back on the fire and shook off the memories. There wasn't any time. The flames were gaining on him, hissing down the corridors of the doomed starship.

He ran.

His fursoles pattered on the mirror metal, the only sound save the fire's whisper in this worm's gullet of a corridor that twisted away from the ship's heart, bypassing the weaponry levels and the living levels and the observing levels. It wasn't meant for people—only for maintenance equipment. Ahead, in the curve of the wall, reflections of the fire behind him danced. He'd found the corridor his first day aboard the ship. He hadn't told anyone. Sajit was a survivor.

He had grown up fleecing the *dorezdas* in the junglestreets of Aírang on his homeworld, and he'd fought his way through two terrible wars.

I can't die now! he was thinking. I've already been through too much! He was twelve years old.

He flung his cloak behind him, sacrificing it to the fire. *That'll slow you down!* He threw out all his weapons, until he was down to the bundle he had packed away in case it ever came to this. If it would only stop to consume the cloak and the weapons and not catch up with him—

And there was the hatch he wanted. He shoved at it with his whole body—he had not much weight to put into it—but it wouldn't give. It was too cramped to make a dash and crash it open, and he felt the heat behind him, he felt his blood ready to boil and the sweat streaming—

An idea. He turned his laser-irises on the doorway and sizzled the metal with a lethal stare, then wriggled through a stomach-wrenching gravity reversal—

And landed lightly on his feet. He was where he hoped he'd be: the launch hangar of the Inquestors. A wide ledge that extended outside the delphinoid starship, protected from empty space by an insubstantial dome of force. Above, the stars shone.

Straight ahead, so far that they looked like toys, three dead ships floated, three silver amulets hanging in the blackness. When he craned his neck he could see how the upper levels of his own ship had been pried open and shredded by the attackers. Whoever they had been. It had been one side or the other, waiting in ambush at the transdimensional nexus as they burst blind out of the overcosm

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into realspace. It didn't matter who it had been. The Inquestral mission had failed.

And here on the hangar, just as Sajit had hoped, shiny-new and sleek as a wild silverdove, was the Inquestral landing craft.

If things had gone as they should have, this lander would have come to Ymvyrsh and the Inquestors would have stood in the parched fields of the razed planet, tall, their shimmercloaks blushing in the wind, their faces serene, old, unruffled as they dictated the terms of the Inquestral peace upon the warring worlds of Ymvyrsh and Ainverell. Sajit could see the scene now: the Inquestors standing, calm and compassionate, while husks of old buildings fell burning to the ground . . . it was not to be. No Inquestor would come to Ymvyrsh now. Only a young boy who wanted to be alive.

He clutched his bundle under his arm. It seemed thinner than before, and something metal was digging into his side, cold. The starlight, unseen for the three subjective months of overcosm travel, was strange to him; here too there was coldness. He moved quickly to the landing craft, shivering. He didn't want to admit the cold was fear.

He found the entrance and opened it, sliding his slight body easily down the shaft. There were two rooms, like pears joined at the stems: the one he was in was wide enough for two or three adults. Half-light, bluish and diffuse, played over shelves of provisions. That was good—he'd have to learn to operate the lander somehow, he'd have to find Ymvyrsh—he'd need food.

I'll find Ymvyrsh somehow. A world's a world, even when it's at war, he thought fiercely. *I'll sing for a few cheap meals, or if they're too poor I'll find something less honorable to do. . . .*

He crept towards the passageway that led to the control room. If the lander was at all like a standard short-range vessel, there would be no problem, but—

The lander lurched to life! Sajit was jerked forward into the control cabin. He felt violent pain in his foot and wondered distantly whether it was broken. For a moment he closed his eyes. The lander had been on automatic! His plans were ruined!

When he opened his eyes he saw a swath of blue fur that rippled, the hem of a robe that shimmered pink against the dark blue. . . .

"Lord Inquestor!" he whispered, knowing he must be in the presence of one of the rulers of the Dispersal of Man. He did not dare look up. When he tried to move his foot, pain stabbed him. He had to say something. "I am Sajit-without-a-clan, born on the world Alykh and three years a soldier of the Inquest," he said, keeping

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his eyes fixed on the hem of the shimmercloak. The shimmercloak sparkled, a million jewel facets in the living cloth. He was almost hypnotized by it.

The Inquestor said nothing for a long time. When he spoke, it was not the authoritative voice of an old man. It was a young voice, a voice that struggled to master terror. "I am," the Inquestor said, "Ton Elloran n'Taanyel Tath, Inquestor-that-is-to-be."

Sajit looked up. Above the sparkling raiment was the face of a boy, perhaps only a year or two older than Sajit himself. "You're only a—" he burst out, then bit his tongue.

"Yes, a boy," Ton Elloran said. "Get up, Sajit-without-a-clan."

"I've hurt my foot."

The other boy knelt down beside him and half-lifted him so that he was leaning against the wall of the passageway. Sajit saw into his eyes, then; but he could not understand what he saw. They were clear, gray eyes that seemed to mask a terrible loneliness. For a while they did not speak; and the lander sped on, steadying itself, knowing its destination.

Elloran said, "I have to finish the mission, you know."

"What do you mean, Inquestor, why?"

"When we saw that the ship was doomed, the Inquestors in command chose me, the youngest, to survive. They decided they had lived long enough. . . ."

"And you will do what four Inquestral ships couldn't do?" said Sajit, dismayed.

"Listen. We tried to send Inquestors to Ymvyrsh a long time ago, by tachyon bubble. We knew from disturbances in the lines of communication, from planetary thinkhive to planetary thinkhive, we knew of this war that has exceeded all proportions the Inquest laid down for such interplanetary wars . . . the tachyon bubble systems would not work. The planets had been sealed off to the Inquest; the receiving stations tampered with, refusing all the incoming routes! Can you understand what this means? They have rejected the Inquest, perhaps . . . now I must land on Ymvyrsh. I, an Inquestor, inviolate, must find the Inquestor who rules on Ymvyrsh, if he still exists, make arrangements for the war to end, and return to Uran s'Varek. Surely the Inquestor-in-power will have access to a tachyon bubble system—and surely it must work for departures if not for unwanted visitors. . . ."

Sajit saw that he was speaking like a textbook. Didn't the boy know how impossible it would be? Didn't he know that you don't just go charging down to a war-torn planet and make peace?

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The boy went on. "I know what you're thinking!" he said, sounding very young suddenly. "You think you should stop me or something. You think I can't do this. You didn't exactly have this in mind when you sneaked aboard this lander instead of dying with the ship as was your duty."

"I didn't come this far to die."

"Why don't you kill me, then? Then you wouldn't be troubled by a meddlesome apprentice Inquestor—"

"Ton Elloran, I didn't say anything about killing—"

"Listen. You are a soldier child of the Inquest, aren't you? You have laser-irises, implanted at the time of your induction, and you could kill me at any time with a glance and a subvocalized command. The ship is yours for the taking."

Sajit looked at the older boy, and he knew he couldn't kill him. You just *couldn't* kill an Inquestor. It went against everything—

"I told you, Sajit-without-a-clan. To harm me would be to harm yourself. Even a rebel like you can't resist a truth so deeply ingrained. I *can* perform the Inquest's mission on Ymvyrsh. . . ." Elloran looked away, then got up and clapped his hands, blanking the metal wallshields to let in the starlight. It must be at least a day's journey to the star Darronderrik around which Ymvyrsh and Ainverell revolved, twin worlds locked in a slow pavane around the same star, in one orbit . . . yet never at peace. Sajit could make nothing of the starstream; he was not one of those to whom the night sky sang. He liked cities. Blackness and stars meant bleakness and war to him. . . .

His foot still ached. He struggled to get up, propped himself against the wall of the linking corridor, and thought: *So much for my clever plans.*

He clenched back a tear. When he saw that Ton Elloran was not looking, he let that tear trickle down, tickling his cheek. Then he tried to stand up and winced with pain, and the bundle he'd wedged under his arm slipped and clattered to the floor, spilling its contents—

Elloran turned, startled.

. . . Untuned strings jangling . . . a sussurant sigh . . . a silvery breathy keening . . . glint of metal and polished wood and intagliate agates. . . .

Sajit said, half to himself, "At least I haven't lost everything from my past, then."

He picked it up—the whisperlyre—the only thing that linked him to his homeworld and to his nameless father—and cradled it in his

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arms. Sounds, random, an almost-harmony, cascaded; but he did not play.

For no song came.

The two of them travelled on for two or three sleeps, not speaking much, distrusting one another. Through the crystalline shipwalls shone unrecognized stars; and the star Darronderrik grew from pinpoint to topaz cabochon, fireball-brilliant. Sajit slept mostly. But dreams of the past haunted him, and to sleep was as restive as to stay awake. . . .

. . . Aírang, a city of mazes within mazes, chief city of the pleasure-world Alykh, where tall spires stung the violet sky, where the tired and the rootless and the jaded came and bought love and release, and where they rode the varigrav coasters until they had purged all their pain, where they came for a sleep or two and were wooed by the splendor and awed by the glitter and did not see the hovels of those who called the world their homeworld; that was Alykh. A tapestry stitched with jewels and seamed with sewers. . . .

. . . hurt old eyes that could not quite meet his own, old eyes in a fresh new face, the eternal fresh face of the Alykhish pleasure girl, sung of in a thousand songs, perfect face unlined by worry, face replaced each summer for the new season before the blemishes could come . . . the voice: *Leave, Sajit! Leave before I don't have the heart to kick you out. Take the whisperlyre. Take anything you want. I don't want anything left here to remind me of the* dorezda *who spawned you in my womb* . . . tall figure of a man waiting. A new *dorezda.*

. . . growing up in a small room with moulting walls; the displacement plate at the street corner was defunct and overgrown with weeds and you had to walk the four klomets to the streets of the strutting starmen. . . .

. . . and the whisperlyre. There was a metal-wood harpframe that supported the seven strings for plucking and the sixty-eight sympathetic strings; and in the body of the frame were the thousands of tiny whisperpassages where the ionized wind rushed and re-echoed and transmuted the ping of the string into lonely mountains' wuthering and surf-shatter of abandoned shores, the wind that gave the whisperlyre its name, that drew its energy from the heat of your body, so that when you threw all your passion and all your heart into the song you would become cold, like a statue, like a corpse. . . .

. . . please sir, take me with you, you're a singer like my father, I'm an orphan sir, help . . .

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. . . beaten and abandoned amid the firesnows of Ont . . . .

. . . voice of the tall Inquestor, grip of the restraint-field—*Don't run any more, boy. It's over. You'll go to the wars like every other child, and if you return you'll be initiated into a profession and perhaps your singing will stand you in good stead and you'll find a good musicians' clan even. . . .*

. . . fingertingle of a taut string, shimmerfade of an afterwhisper, a dying strain, fading, fading . . .

Sajit woke, clutching his whisperlyre. He wrapped his arms around it, recharging it, feeling the warmth steal away from his body. He was about to play—

"Come quickly!" the voice of Ton Elloran from the other room.

Sajit limped through the passageway. A planet shone in the darkness, blue-green wisp-streaked with white. ". . . Ymvyrsh?"

"You don't understand. Ainverell, Ainverell—it's gone!"

"What do you mean?"

"There's only one planet here when there should be two!"

Sajit went up to the other boy. He touched the edge of an untouchable loneliness and shied away. Elloran said, "It is the right place. The lander doesn't make mistakes. Ainverell has been obliterated."

"Then the war is over," said Sajit, trying to sound encouraging.

"The background radiation level is low. Ainverell was destroyed a long time ago. Perhaps even a century." Suddenly, Elloran seemed a child, crying for sympathy: "What shall I do now?"

But before Sajit could comfort him he had remembered his place. He had drawn himself up tall, the way Sajit supposed an Inquestor must always be. Sajit said, "Is there nothing in your training to cover this?"

"I'm only an Inquestor-to-be," said Elloran. "Ton Alkamathdes, my old teacher, would have known. He was half a millennium old or more, and a master utopia hunter. . . ."

"What's a utopia hunter?"

"One who exposes the flaws in utopias, who compassionately brings change and vitality to worlds that think they have found perfection," said Elloran. He seemed to be reciting.

"It sounds wrong."

"What would you know, Sajit-without-a-clan?" Elloran turned to watch the planet, which was growing little by little in the blackness. Then, almost to himself, he said, "Alkamathdes was assigned to rule over Ymvyrsh just before I left on this expedition . . . but surely he is Kingling here no longer. We were six subjective months on this

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journey; in realtime, a century has passed . . . he has long moved on to other things, I think."

They stood in silence for some moments, while the planet loomed nearer. . . .

"Ton Elloran," said Sajit, "if Ainverell has been dead for so long, why were we attacked? Who was it who attacked us?"

"I don't know!" Elloran shouted. "What do you think I am, the galactic thinkhive on Uran s'Varek with all the answers? Listen, soldier boy. We're going down on the planet. We're going to find the people in power, locate the Inquestral tachyon bubble system so that I can return to Uran s'Varek and report on the mission—"

"And what about me? You Inquestors can take your tachyon bubbles and flick across the Dispersal of Man in an attosecond. I have to take my chances with time dilation—"

Elloran said, "The Inquest is compassionate. I will take care of you."

"You can't even take care of yourself!" Sajit said hotly. "You're going to land us conspicuously in the middle of enemies and you're going to get us all killed!"

"What is a life to the Inquest?" said Elloran, but his voice quavered. Sajit thought he saw tears, and he was appalled, that an Inquestor should show uncertainty. He turned his back on Elloran and returned to the other chamber.

Later he tried to play the whisperlyre, but could not find more than a few notes. He came out to watch the stars, and to watch Elloran as he stood motionless in the control room. The planet was much nearer now; it filled half the sky. Sajit found no comfort in the thought of earth under his feet. For him every planetfall had always been a scramble to survive. . . .

If it were just me, he thought, *I'd make it, somehow. But with* him *here, not knowing the first thing about survival—*

And then he remembered that he had thought he had seen tears in the Inquestor's eyes, and he thought, *If an Inquestor can weep, anything can happen. The speed of light can change. We could find a utopia down there.*

Ton Elloran n'Taanyel Tath clapped his hands three times, opaquing the shipwalls, putting a shield of mirror metal between them and the threatening planet.

The lander circled the planet, trying to find the cities. There should have been cities, certainly; when Elloran summoned up holoimages from the lander's memory, they saw cities with resounding

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names: Tomástris, Dieker, Zhimward, d'Aíhvad, Ang z'Darronderrik, city of the sun, the capital city Undébarang, where floating avenues radiated from a hill-high obelisk carved from a flawless amethyst that had been grown in the Crystallizing Sea on Uran s'Varek itself . . . they were all gone, these cities, gone without trace.

The lander's orbit spiralled nearer; they burst through the cloud-veil of Ymvyrsh and flew over the land. There were fields that checkered the plains with brown and yellow squares. There were villages, all clustered along narrow roads. Here and there were jade meadows or a crystal serpent of a stream. . . .

The scenery did not change, from one end of the one major land mass to the other. Where Undébarang should have been there was only more of the pastoral landscape. It stretched to the foothills of a mountain range, mist-blue in the distance. And the sky—

Once before had Sajit heard of a sky this blue, and that was in a song about old Earth, before the Dispersal of Man. It was blue and jewel-clear and pure as a ringing octave.

"Do you think—?" he whispered.

"No," Elloran replied coldly. "Earth was never like in the songs. You should know better than that. But no doubt about it . . . this world is suspicious. It's the same from shore to shore, and no culture is really like that. It feels . . . *set up*."

"But beautiful."

"I fear it," Elloran said. And then he stopped himself short, and Sajit could tell he was angry at himself for having let down his guard in front of a mere clanless soldier child. . . .

The Inquestor chose a field that lay about where the center of Undébarang should have been, about half a klomet from a cluster of village huts that bordered a winding lane. Softly the lander came down, and they stepped down from the craft. . . . Sajit found the gravity quite light; he hardly had to limp at all.

He took a few steps out in the bouncy-soft grass, turned, faced the wall of mist-high mountains, and caught his breath. He saw the rainbows.

They arched out from a point somewhere behind the highest peak, resolving from the mists like cadences of a song; they transsected the sky, radiating from a single, hidden, cloud-high point . . . they were frozen songs. Chords woven from singing strands of meadow, ruby, tangerine, sky, lapis, topaz, plum; peacock-painted bridges, jewel-candy-arcing, heart-stoppingly still.

Sajit felt very happy. He turned to Ton Elloran, smiling, but he saw no responsive smile. "It's so beautiful!" he cried out.

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"Too beautiful," said Elloran curtly. "Let's go into the village now."

"What about provisions?"

"I am an Inquestor. They will provide."

Dismay flooded Sajit. "What do you mean, Ton Elloran? Are you mad or something? Here we are on a strange planet with a lander stuffed with food and we're going to walk into an alien village without anything to eat?"

"*I know what I'm doing!*" Elloran had begun walking resolutely down a twisty-curving path half-buried in the tall grass, his shimmercloak flapping and making sparks on the emerald green. . . .

"Powers of powers!" Sajit cried. "Don't you care about your own skin, Inquestor?" *Just like a damned* dorezda, *thinking he's so important, wouldn't last five minutes on Atrang.* He climbed back into the lander, found the provisions shelves, scooped out a couple of handfuls of concentrate packages, found his old bundle on the floor and stuffed it with them. He looked around furtively—street children's habits died hard—and the closeness of the lander's interior oppressed him after the outside. It was then that he realized that Ymvyrsh was a very beautiful world. *And comforting,* thought the boy, hefting the weight onto his shoulder and making for the exit. As he left he glanced at the unplayed whisperlyre, abandoned on the mirror metal floor. It was like a recurring dream.

Half-reluctant, he picked it up. The warmth fled from his fingers. . . .

He ran out into the sunshine. Even the whisperlyre felt less cold. He turned to gasp at the rainbows criss-crossing the blue distance, and then hurried after Ton Elloran . . . and caught up with him, breathless. . . .

"I see you wish to throw in your lot with me," said Elloran, looking straight ahead. "That would be wiser."

"No, but I can't just leave you to walk into a—"

Ton Elloran cut him short with a look. They walked on. Presently they came to another field with children at play, pre-warrior–aged, six or seven years old. They were running like wild animals; there was shrill laughter in the sunlight. Sajit saw that they never frowned at all. Sajit felt as though a song were about to burst from him, as he had often felt when he was first learning the old songs, a warmth welling up inside. But he only said, "The war is over." It was a strange thought.

They were approaching the cluster of houses. A few peasants walked by, glancing only cursorily at the two of them; again Sajit

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saw that they were always smiling—a little vacuously perhaps—in the manner of people who are not used to being stingy with their laughter. . . .

Sajit remembered the streets of his homeworld and was envious.

Elloran was becoming more and more impatient. Finally he went up to a man and stopped him. His blue eyes, gleaming in a wizened face crowned with white wreath-like hair, exuded kindness. He smelled of old earth: pungent, heady, warm.

Elloran said, formally, "I am Ton Elloran n'Taanyel Tath, son of Prince Taanyel, Inquestor-who-is-to-be. I am here to seek the Inquestors-that-rule, to end the war between Ymvyrsh and Ainverell . . ." —His voice broke a little. — "and to bring you peace. Will you give me hospitality and information?"

The old man looked at both of them amusedly and said, finally, "My house is yours, of course. We don't see many strangers here; don't rightly know what an 'Inquestor' may be, but you seem important-looking enough. Be no war here, though. We and the next village are at peace a hundred years, more than that."

Maybe he's right, Sajit thought. *Maybe he can automatically get us food because he looks important—or something.* But he clutched his parcel tighter, even though reason told him that this wasn't Aírang.

But Elloran seemed annoyed. He was talking to the peasant as though he were an imbecile: "Then who rules here, if you don't know what an Inquestor is?"

The man said (without ever losing his jovial countenance), "Rainbow King rules here, of course. Lookit, over the mountain tops."

Sajit stole a glance at the distant mountains behind him, with the color-arcs poised above the mistveils. . . .

"Yes," the old man went on, "Rainbow King. Come now, guests, and eat. Journey from next village made you weary, I'm sure."

"Wait!" Elloran shouted after the man, who had already begun to stride towards one of the squat huts. "Who is the Rainbow King? Is he an Inquestor?" But the man was out of earshot.

Sajit said, "It's a beautiful world. Why ask questions, Elloran?"

"You stupid soldier child," Elloran said impatiently. His anger seemed so out of place here. "If this is really the way things are, why were we attacked? Who's trying to fool whom? What would Ton Alkamathdes have done? I wish I had his guidance—"

The warmth of this world stirred in Sajit again. He remembered the smiles everywhere, the jewel-glitter of rainbows, the laughter . . . he wanted to embrace the world. He wanted to forget Alykh

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and Ont and a dozen stinking worlds and the endless overcosm wars. "I don't care," he said hotly, "what you say! I only know what I see, and it's—it's a utopia!"

"That's just what I'm afraid of," said the boy Inquestor, and Sajit had never seen anyone look so worn with grief.

Sajit liked the house at once—it was so different from the one on Aírang, the peeling, dust-thick house with the painful memories. This one had four detached L-shaped structures surrounding a central atrium, plain whitewashed walls immaculately clean, leaning roofs neatly thatched, and the air faintly citrus-fragrant. They were shown to their room—one of the four structures—wide windows overlooking a dale where primitive autoploughs moved ponderously, working the land . . . then they went into the atrium, and sat on the furry floor which curved to support the contours of their bodies.

"Forgive me," the old man said, "if my family and I do not eat with you. We have already eaten, of course."

The family had gathered: a wife and two husbands, two children, drably dressed but brightly smiling; they seemed normal, dignified. The children rushed out to play, the wife and husbands left, and the old man departed after a moment and reentered with food: a tray of fresh *shorreth* cheese, baked *yunaki* with the plumage still showing in a vivid blue ring around the drumsticks. . . .

"You see," Elloran said, "wherever one goes, they still cannot deny food to an Inquestor." Sajit began to feel foolish for having dragged the concentrate packages along. The world of the Inquestors was clearly not the world of the streets.

Sajit looked at the old man, whose benign expression seemed unchanged, and said, "And where is it that your Rainbow King dwells?" He thought it must be some kind of folk belief.

"In the mountains. Far. Where all the rainbows meet, stranger. Dangerous, you can't go there—be pteratygers in the mountain peaks. . . ."

"Oh, come on, there are no pteratygers on this planet. Only on Uran s'Varek—" Elloran stopped short. He seemed to be thinking, very hard. Then, abruptly, "Do you never stop smiling, powers of powers?"

"Why should we? Everyone's happy here."

Sajit laughed. "Why shouldn't this planet be a utopia, Ton Elloran?" He reached for a *yunaki* drumstick—

The old man seized the tray; without another word he left the atrium and entered one of the L-shaped rooms.

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"What's this?" Sajit cried angrily. "What have we done to make you take away the food?"

There was no answer. Darkness was falling, a little at a time; through one of the four passages out of the atrium they could see the rainbows still, vivid in the graying sky. Sajit saw that Elloran had become very pale; something was in him that Sajit could not touch. The air chilled a little. He was hungry.

"Well, you should at least thank me for having the presence of mind to bring these." He shook out the bundle. Elloran's hand shot out and grabbed one of the packets. *I've been selfish,* thought Sajit. *This boy's been starving and he's too proud or too preoccupied to say a word.* And now he saw the rainbows stained with the crimson of the twilight, and he wondered what kept them in place. Surely they were not natural. . . .

Elloran said, "They don't eat. But they have food, and they *pretend.*"

"Let's go to the room now." Sajit got up; tiredness weighed him down for the first time, and he felt the limp a little. He bundled together the packets and the whisperlyre—they had enough food for a couple of days, if they didn't gorge themselves. They turned to go into the guestroom—

"Look!" Sajit heard Elloran's urgent whisper. "Look, through the entry opposite the mountains . . . do you remember the autoploughs, digging up the field in the valley down there?"

Sajit nodded. They crept up to the entry and stood there a moment. A moon had arisen, hauntingly like the old descriptions of the moons of old Earth, and the fields were eerie black, flecked with mirror metal. . . .

"Look carefully!" said Elloran. "Do you see it?"

Sajit strained. He saw the autoploughs move into a pool of moonlight. They were not ploughing now. They were going back, smoothing out the earth, patting it down, restoring it . . . Sajit could tell that by morning there would have been no progress. It was all an illusion. Chill claws of fear clutched him. "What'll we do?" he cried, too loud, stifling himself too late.

"We wake them up. We get answers. We find out who is doing this—"

"But—"

Elloran had already stalked toward the L-shaped structure into which they had seen the stranger go before. He banged the doorstud with his fist. It shot open—

"Wake up, in the Inquest's name!" he shouted. His voice sounded

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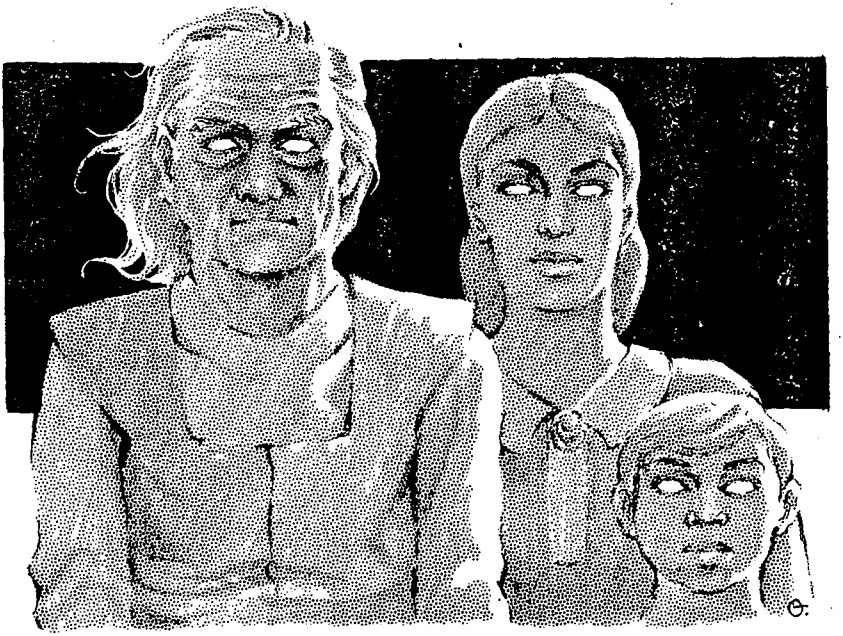

shrill and small in the huge silence. Moonlight fell into the room. Blocking the broad stripe of light was the peasant, his face a silhouette. "What's the meaning of these illusions?" Elloran screamed at him. "Who are you trying to delude? Why was this world made to look like a utopia? Why did you destroy the Inquestral mission ship? Who is the ruler of this planet?"

The old man didn't answer. He seemed frozen in place.

Sajit looked deep into his eyes and saw only mirror-blankness. A light wind from the open window played with the old man's hair, but the face never quivered. . . . Sajit shrank back and found himself backing into the woman. She didn't move. The whole family was gathered in this room like disused dolls on a shelf. . . .

Sajit shivered. He had never feared the *dorezdas* with their brash talk and their gullibility, or being abandoned on strange inhospitable planets, or warships streaking through the overcosm . . . he turned to Elloran. "What'll we do?"

Elloran said, "I must complete my mission."

Sajit followed him out of the room and into the atrium; away from the room and the strangely still family he could breathe a little easier. Elloran flicked his head toward the mountains, now a black

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wall blocking the starlight and buttressed by the rainbows, drained of their jewel colors now, ghost-bridges arcing in the dark. . . .

"We can't go there!" Sajit said. "That's probably the most dangerous place on this planet. After what we've seen I'm ready to believe there are pteratygers in the mountains—"

"Aren't you interested in knowing how millions of people, hundreds of cities, have vanished without a trace?" said Elloran. "I know I don't have to bring peace to this world anymore. It is utterly at peace—it can't be anything else, since everything is returned to its starting point every morning. But now" —and Sajit was startled by the boy's intensity— "I must hunt down this utopia, Sajit-without-a-clan. Ton Alkamathdes told me that man must dream of utopias always—but to imagine that one has *achieved* that goal. . . . is to deny life. The Inquest is built upon this one axiom, Sajit. The quest for the eternal dream, the quest and the never finding, are the heart of the Dispersal of Man. . . ." His eyes were closed and he seemed to be quoting.

"Well," said Sajit, "let's find the lander then."

"We can get some food from there, enough for the journey."

They had begun walking now, and the house was a hundred meters or so behind them, and the mountains seemed no nearer. This was a world without displacement plates . . . people walked everywhere.

"Where is the lander?" Sajit said. "I can't see it, it's too dark."

"It's gone!"

The grass was flattened for about twenty meters square. Moonlight silvered the grass-strands. "This world doesn't have any transportation system," said Sajit. "You'll have to go back to the village—"

Elloran had begun walking in the direction of the mountains. The grass seemed to swallow him up. Amid the tall blackness the shimmercloak rippled. "Come back!" Sajit screamed. "You're crazy!"

The boy walked on quickly, not looking back. His eyes were fixed on the mountains. If he wanted to find the Rainbow King it would have to be on foot, all the way. "I won't go," Sajit was yelling into the air. "My foot hurts and you don't know what you're getting into. I don't believe in your philosophies, I just want to eat and sleep!" He limped after Elloran. The path was just wide enough for a boy to wedge himself through soft grass-stalks. "I don't care about your mission, I just care about me! There must be someplace here that isn't full of—" he remembered the room in the moonlight with the unmoving, deathlike family.

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Elloran stopped in the distance. "You're right. It's my mission, not yours." He turned his back to Sajit and went on walking.

"Wait!" Sajit thrust hard against the ground, ignoring the limp. Pain lanced his foot as he caught up with Elloran. "I've got all the food."

"Come on."

They went on walking for an eternity. Every step stabbed his foot; he was dizzy from sleeplessness. He heard Elloran muttering, "There must be a displacement plate somewhere. This is supposed to have been one of the most industrialized planets in this area, they must have been industrialized enough to blow up Ainverell. . . ."

"And someone must have disposed of the lander, somehow," said Sajit, out of breath. "It's incomprehensible."

Ahead were the mountains with the rainbows drained of color. They trudged on. Sajit was so tired. Elloran never slacked. *Why am I following him?* Sajit thought. *Just because he wears a shimmercloak? Just through force of habit?* Ahead of him, only the shimmercloak shone, the pink blushing against the dark blue, strangely gaudy in the darkness. The stars of the Dispersal shone on them; the sky was star-thick except for where the ghosts of rainbows made arches of mist. *We'll never make it anywhere*, Sajit thought. He wondered what death would feel like.

After a while—a couple of klomets, it felt like—the pain in his foot was continual. The grass had thinned and the ground was stubbed with sharp stones. Sajit stumbled, whispered, "Powers of powers! I can't go on. Just leave me here—tomorrow I'll be well enough to forage for myself. . . ."

Elloran looked at him, expressionless. "No. We'll rest."

"What about your infernal mission?"

"The Inquest is compassionate."

"I hope the Inquest burns!" he shouted, unable to control himself. "Can't you act like a human being instead of a servocorpse?"

"The Inquest is compassionate . . . and I do not want to go on alone," Elloran said, looking away. Sajit felt the boy's loneliness and was moved.

They stumbled on for a few more meters. The ground became very smooth—they could not really see what the terrain was—and when they sat down it contoured itself to their bodies. They must be in the foundations of an old house, long since swept away in whatever metamorphosis it was that had changed Ymvyrsh from a war-torn world to an illusion of paradise. The moon had set, and they could hardly see their goal ahead of them but for the jagged eclipsing of

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the starfield, the serrated black horizon.

"Do you want some food?" Sajit was emptying the bundle.

. . . jangle of wirestrings, whisper of shadow spirits . . .

"You still have that thing?" Elloran said, reaching for one of the packets.

Sajit picked it up. His fingers felt cold immediately. Instinctively he clutched the whisperlyre to his thin chest; he felt the warmth drain from his body. He plucked a few notes, touched the tuning studs to find the *pelog* mode of the ancients . . . the jangle resolved into rainbow resonance misted with sighs. . . .

A song surfaced, fully crystallized—the first song he had ever learnt from the *dorezda* who had taken him off planet and then dumped him on Ont like an old whisperlyre that has lost all its music. . . .

eih! 'asheveraín am'-planzhet ka dhand-erúden,
eih! eskrendaí: pu eyáh chítarans hyemadh. . . .

ai: when man dispersed we wept for the dead earth;
ai, we cried: where is the homeworld of the heart?

At first he was thinking as he sang, *I shouldn't do this in front of an Inquestor who has probably heard all the best singers in the Dispersal, who don't run out of breath in the wrong places,* and he didn't pay much attention, so his voice cracked easily. It was a breathy, impure, poignant voice with little conscious artistry. After a while he was able to ignore his companion and to sing only for himself—not the way he used to sing, eyeing the purses of passing strangers—and it was beautiful in the alien night, and full of pain.

Elloran was saying, "You could be good, if you were trained. Didn't the Inquestors see to it?"

"I ran away," Sajit said testily. He was surprised that Elloran had been listening to him. Elloran looked away, avoiding conflict. The semi-sentient shimmercloak shone in the pastels that even Sajit knew meant *safety, pure air, healthful environment.* The song had frozen Sajit's chest, and the breeze made him shiver. Elloran said, "Yes—the homeworld of the heart. That's what this planet feels like, you know. My shimmercloak feels it. The meadows. The mountains."

"Just words, Inquestor." He had never met anyone who really thought about the words of songs. . . .

"It's a cruel, grotesque parody of a utopia," he heard Elloran say.

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"It could be a test. Maybe two Grand Inquestors are playing *makrugh* and they have a wager on me." Sajit didn't really listen; Elloran often talked about things he couldn't visualize . . . Grand Inquestors. Or Uran s'Varek, a planet *full* of Inquestors. Louder, Elloran said, "Do you think we'll ever find it?"

"What?" Sajit's eyelids were heavy and he didn't feel like talking.

"The 'homeworld of the heart', *chitarans hyemadh* in the high-tongue."

"Who's looking?" murmured Sajit through his tiredness. "A twenty-thousand-year-old song that beggar boys sing . . ."

"Look at the trouble they've gone to, to create this place!" Elloran's voice was intense. "*And I have to destroy it.* Without vindictiveness. Only with compassion. If you were an Inquestor you would understand these things, soldier boy."

"Don't brood," Sajit snapped. More kindly, he said, "Go to sleep." He let the whisperlyre slip from his arms and the warmth ooze back into them. The breeze played over him. *I scolded an Inquestor!* he thought suddenly. But he wasn't alarmed. He felt almost happy. Perhaps it was the certainty of hopelessness. The soft wind played like an afterwhisper, resolving the dissonance of the day's terror.

They each took up a corner of the floor space, as far as possible from one another, each treasuring his aloneness.

In the morning, under a dazzling sun, they scratched at the earth a meter or two from the roofless floor, and they found a displacement plate.

Sun-drenched, the sky glowed celadon-blue over the plate; Elloran stood where they imagined its center to be, eyes closed. It was hard to make out the patches of mirror metal under the overgrowth of moss and bramble. Before them, the mountains and their rainbow archways, unchanged from the previous day. Elloran was subvocalizing commands to the displacement field mechanism; Sajit hoped that it still worked. He moved up to stand beside the young Inquestor, bundle slung over his shoulder. Without warning, an odd dislocation—

They were still in the same place! But no . . . weren't the mountains a little nearer? He tried to move but found that his feet were tangled in brambles. They'd moved forward perhaps a couple of klomets, and the landscape was almost the same, and everything that had grown over the displacement plate had been flicked in with them.

"Progress!" said Elloran. But he was disappointed when he saw

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how much further the mountains were. "Let's go on walking. We'll be able to uncover another plate soon if we follow the standard patterns. . . ."

They walked for another four hours or so before they uncovered the next one. It was not a standard system, or else some of the plates had been destroyed by time or design. They stopped for a meal—that was the end of the food—and flicked on to the next plate.

Two days went by. The mountains did seem a little nearer. Hunger gnawed at Sajit, but he did not see the Inquestor tire at all. They slept, or tried to, by night; hunger kept Sajit awake. There was water sometimes, from a stream; but they seemed to have passed the agricultural lands now, and there were no wild animals they could have trapped and eaten even if either of them had known how. *Why am I going along with him?* Sajit kept asking himself. He found no satisfactory answer; and the pain in his stomach blotted out everything, so he stopped asking. Around them, the countryside was beautiful as ever. And ahead—

The rainbows hung, hugging the black mountains, taunting them. Sometimes Sajit would sing, but it made him too cold, and he would stop in mid-phrase. And Ton Elloran never looked back. An Inquestor was not like a normal person, Sajit thought; even the young ones were different.

On the third day, they found a plate that was scrubbed clean, a dissonant silver island in the green sea. When Elloran leapt on to it he cried, "It clicks well, it understands all the subvocalizations!" Sajit saw that he was smiling, a wan little smile, and then Elloran called out in a big voice, "Rainbow King, your reign is ending! The Inquest has come!" and they flicked out and—

They were standing on a ledge, overlooking a tapestry of green fur quilted with fields and embroidered with wavy rivers, and the wind on their faces was cold, and underneath his tiredness even Sajit felt an exaltation creep up. . . . "These paths are constantly used," he said. "There *is* someone in the mountains, someone at the end of the rainbows. . . ." They scrambled for the next plate, only ten meters away against a bare wall of fine-grained schist, and then burst up into a higher level. There was a rainbow directly overhead, a cartwheel of colors fused into the intense blue sky. He gave a wild yodel of joy, the mountains echoed like a well-tuned whisperlyre, and then they crossed the brief plateau and gazed over an abrupt chasm that cradled an emerald serpent of a valley, raced to the next plate and were over the chasm on a ledge with a sheer rockface ahead—

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"There are no more plates," said Sajit. He felt dismay as though awakened from a dream of soaring.

Elloran vanished behind an outcropping; he had gone to find a displacement plate. "It can't just end like this!" Sajit heard him murmur, and then he turned around, his back to the tall wall that blocked their path, and saw—

A swoop of shadow. A momentary eclipse of the sun . . . then a flurry of pink ringed with sunlight, diving, piercing the rainbow. . . .

A pteratyger! he thought. His heart leapt at the sight. It swerved out of the firehalo of sunlight, pink feathered wings outstretched, motionless. The fierce feline features were frozen, inconstruable. And then, darting from behind the first one like silverdoves, only impossibly far away, a whole exaltation of them, circling, spiralling behind the leader like links in a gene-strand—

"Elloran, come quickly, there are pteratygers!" Sajit shouted. He turned for a moment and ran toward the boulder where he thought his companion had gone. He stood there, out of breath with joy, and then Elloran was pointing, wild with fear, "Sajit, quickly!"

He whirled round. They were wheeling ahead, near enough to see the glow of ember eyes. And then one broke loose and plummeted towards Sajit, wings erect, claws glistening.

It was so beautiful! He froze for a moment, then the soldier in him thrust loose and he dilated his eyes and glared the laser-glare and subvocalized the secret command and—

(Burst of flame, pink feathers drifting, sunlight. . . .)

—the circle shivered, abruptly reformed as a V-line of angry pteratygers arrowed at his face—

And then stopped again. Reformed in no discernible pattern, Sajit saw, they were looking past him now, as though someone had given a command.

He stole a glance behind.

Elloran had emerged completely from behind the rocks. His shimmercloak flapped in the wind. For the first time that day Sajit was sick with hunger.

Elloran said, his voice a whisper in the wind, "You dare to assault me, pteratygers, creatures of the Inquest?"

The pteratygers circled uncertainly; a few broke from the flock and swerved up into the wind, rainbowing over the rainbow. Sajit stared at this boy who did not know the simplest thing about self-preservation and yet could face a pteratyger and say simply *how dare you*. Then one of the creatures swooped swiftly on to the rock-ledge, facing them. Sajit stepped back involuntarily.

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"My—lord—" said the pteratyger. A plaintive, screech-edged voice like a songpipe with a broken reed.

"You are far from Uran s'Varek now," Elloran said. "You serve the Rainbow King?"

"Yes—" The cry pierced the wind and Sajit retreated again.

"Why did you attack us?" asked Elloran.

"The soulless one—he should not have penetrated—beyond the rainbow barriers—the King's domain—must be rendered inoperative—"

"Don't harm him!" Elloran hissed. Sajit flinched.

"I do not understand—you are not the King—yet wear the shimmercloak—I am a mere animal—I obey you—"

"Where is the King?"

"In Irísbarah—the rainbow castle—"

"There are no more displacement plates," said Elloran.

"What's a soulless one?" Sajit blurted out, sick with fear.

"I don't know!" Elloran whispered. Sajit froze. Then Elloran said, "Take me to the Rainbow King!" He spoke firmly but his voice cracked on the last word. The pteratyger did not notice the Inquestor's uncertainty. Sajit stared at its face. The teeth glistened like icicles. Then Elloran said, "No. Take me to—where the soulless ones are rendered inoperative. . . ."

"Powers of powers, Elloran, are you trying to kill me?"

"Be quiet!" Sajit was cowed into silence now, the reflex of obedience to the Inquestral word taking over. Even now when they had been through so much. To the pteratyger Elloran said, "I will take the soulless one with me."

"As—you—command—" And then it roared, a thunder with a tinge of miaow in it, and came nearer, and crouched down. Elloran mounted without a word, and beckoned for Sajit to get on behind. Sajit took a few steps and caught the creature's foul breath. He could guess what it must feed on. Taking hold of himself, he swung himself over the furry flanks and dug his knees firmly into its body. A heavy purr shook the animal's body. Without warning—

The pteratyger turned to face the sunlight, flapped its wings resoundingly and sprang into the wind—

A moment of burning nausea. And then the pteratyger righted itself and began to climb, hugging the mountainside and slicing through the bittercold air. Sajit's terror turned to exhilaration. When he looked behind he saw the mountains they had crossed with such struggling, huge crag-topped tombstones bursting from the lush green earth. They sundered a rainbow, sending shiver-shards

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of color streaking and swirling. They were only holoimages, then, those rainbows. . . .

"Why does the pteratyger obey you?" Sajit had to shout to hear himself.

"They were created a thousand years ago by an Inquestor on Uran s'Varek, genetically altered from earth animals. They were to be part of an immense game of *makrugh*, you know. They are impelled to obey the shimmercloak—they aren't very intelligent animals."

"What's a soulless one?"

No answer. The pteratyger roared again, its cry shattering the wind's whine, and they soared. The ripple of the animal's muscles under him made Sajit tingle.

Suddenly Elloran cried, "Sajit, you must sing for me, you must—" and he gripped his arm so tightly that it hurt. The touch unnerved Sajit. Inquestors did not cling to soldier boys like children in need. *He has needs,* Sajit thought, and it was not a comfortable thought.

Gently Sajit freed his arm. He shook his bundle, uncovering the whisperlyre, and the fabric swirled away into a speck. Wedging the whisperlyre firmly between them he sang, very softly, the song about the dream of utopia: "*Eih! ashéveraín am-planzhet ka dhand-erúden. . . .*" He thought: *We're going to get killed now. I'm sure of it.* He threw his heart into the song, and the meaning of the words became vivid for him for the first time . . . "*Shenom na chítarans hyemadhá* . . . we yearn for the heart's homeworld . . . *u áthera tinjéh erúdeh* . . . where sun touches earth . . . *z'irsai yver tembáraxein kreshpáh* . . . and rainbows gird the mountains of darkness . . . *z'purreh y'Enguestren tinjéh* . . . and the Inquestor touches the beggar child. . . ." The wind gouged the tears from his cheeks.

His arm still burned from Elloran's desperate grip. He understood his companion a little now. For a moment they had touched, like in the song, as though the utopia for which all men yearned had come already . . . it had not felt like an Inquestor's hand. Only like another boy's.

If this is a false utopia, he thought fiercely, *how could this have come about?* And impulsively—with the cold of the whisperlyre gnawing at him like hunger—he reached out to clasp Elloran's hand. Elloran stared straight ahead, so Sajit couldn't see his face; but for a moment he thought he felt a responding warmth. Maybe not. Maybe it was only the flush of flesh against the cold.

They thrust through the stinging wind, upwards, ripping through moist veils of mist, bursting over a sea of cloud, and then Sajit saw

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what lay ahead. The source of rainbows, set on an island peak in the sea of mist . . .

Irísbarah. The rainbow castle.

Lucent mother-of-pearl pagodas rose like conch-shells wrenched inside out, their spires criss-crossed with arcs of color, crystal-bright against the brilliant blue sky. They soared high against the sun, then dove in a time-frozen glide towards the castle.

"Look!" Elloran pointed to a railinged platform set on top of a high stone column. "It's a receiving station for a tachyon bubble system!"

Sajit could hardly contain himself. "Then there's an Inquestor down there! And—you're an Inquestor, and that means you can arrange to have him send us home, alive, with our bellies full! With a tachyon bubble we can be home today!"

. . . *But there's no home for me*, he remembered suddenly. *Only the war.*

Elloran didn't answer. What was wrong with him? Look at all they'd come through! And now they'd found what they wanted, hadn't they?

They circled the castle a few times. He could almost reach out and touch a pagoda. Then they swooped. He closed his eyes and dreamed of the home he'd never had. But Elloran didn't speak, and Sajit saw that he was in the grip of a terrible tension. "What's the matter with you?" he shouted.

"Don't you understand anything?" Elloran screamed in anguish. "Everything has gone wrong! An *Inquestor* made this world. He made a dead world of utter beauty and he embalmed it so that it would never change. He's a heretic—a false utopian—a madman, and he's down there and he has power to explode a planet to watch the fireworks! An Inquestor gone insane!" He was shaking with rage.

Sajit asked him no more questions. They hovered over a firewall braceleted with menacing, motionless guards, and he heard the relentless clap of the pteratyger's wings and gave up trying to understand.

The pteratyger took them to a ledge under the castle's foundations, artificially smooth. They scrambled down; and when Sajit turned to face the clouds, he saw the pteratyger already diving through a gap in the forest of rainbow arcs, flashing into the sunlight. His eyes smarted.

"Come on!" Elloran said urgently. Sajit turned to see a cavern

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with an irising gate that had just responded to Elloran's subvocalized command. . . .

The gate clanged shut. Darkness. A pungent, chemical air. Windlessness. Silence.

"Are you there, Elloran?" he whispered.

The light touch of the Inquestor's hand, brushing his shoulder. Again the feeling of dislocation, of unreality, of being touched by a person of such power. . . .

"Do you see anything?" Elloran said. The voice startled him.

After a while he could make things out. People, hundreds of people. Not breathing. Standing against the walls, shoved into piles, motionless. Elloran moved towards a pile of bodies. He touched one gingerly. Sajit flinched for him.

"They are all dead."

Sajit said nothing; it wasn't sinking in. "Come on." Holding on to each other, they pushed on into the half dark. They found another door.

The light blinded him for a moment.

Then he saw that they were on a railinged balcony that circled a chamber big as a starship, hollowed out of the rock. There were bodies scattered across the mirror metal floor in stacks, like leaf-heaps in autumn: old men, children, women. Machines on silent hovercasters darted from body to body, sorting, spraying, restacking them in other piles. . . .

Across the hall, doll-sized in the distance, more heaps of sprawling bodies, arranged by age, sex, height, physical attributes.

"Let's go down," said Elloran.

They found a stairway spiralling down to the floor. Sajit gazed upward to see the fan-vaulting of stone rainbows that was echoed in the mirror glitter of the floor. Slowly they walked across the room. It must be three hundred meters across. Each step re-echoed as in a temple. Now and then a machine would scuttle up to them, react to Elloran's shimmercloak, scurry off.

"Servocorpses," whispered Elloran. "A servocorpse factory."

Sajit had seen them before, these dead men reanimated into grisly servants, usually walking a few steps behind one of the *dorezdas*, one with a taste for the exotic, the expensive . . . he already knew what Elloran must be thinking.

"All the people on this planet," he said.

"Yes," said Elloran. "They're all dead."

Another displacement plate—

Valleys of dead bodies, unprocessed, unembalmed, still reeking,

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suspended in huge storage fields. . . .

Rows of blank-eyed children, their limbs wrenched off by war machines, row after row of old men emaciated by warplagues . . .

Cosmetic rooms, skeletons plastifleshed into life . . .

A bridge over another chamber where the dead walked round and round in an eerie procession, smiles soldered on their faces . . .

More displacement plates . . .

They crossed another bridge over a chasm of crematoria, choking with the smoke of incinerating bodies . . . they passed dressing rooms where dead bodies stood stiffly to be decked out in new tunics bright with rainbow dyes and where metal arms patted their hair into shape and rouged their cheeks . . . the whole mountain was a labyrinth, level upon level, peopled with the dead.

It was the silence that was most appalling. All the machines moved noiselessly. And the people, beautiful in death, did not breathe . . . then there were other rooms where autosurgeons were hard at work, clipping cyberinputs into place, and there were rooms where the dead ones walked in circles, their muscles twitching to the movements of unseen strings, and, finally, rooms where the dead ones—row upon row of them—stood talking to the nothingness: *It's a fine day. The crops are good this season. We welcome you, visitor.*

And they found another room where holoimages monitored the ring of clean displacement plates in the foothills. They watched a fresh servocorpse, a young man laughing as the wind made his fresh clothes flap, appear on the plate, run down toward the village, his face flushed with mechanical joy. . . .

"Somewhere in this mountain," said Elloran, "is a machine that runs everything on the planet. A thinkhive of such power that only an Inquestor could have requisitioned it . . ."

"At night they turn them off," said Sajit, remembering the room of living statues. *Not-living* statues. "And they don't really eat, but they have food, make-believe food, and make-believe agriculture. . . ."

"The thinkhive is programmed for utopia, is primed with the things men yearn for but cannot have. . . ."

"No wonder the planet seems like old Earth—the lost homeworld of the heart. . . ."

"Myths, myths, Sajit-without-a-clan!" Elloran chided. But without anger. "If old Earth ever was, if the Dispersal of Man ever really took place, do you think it was really a paradise from which we fell? The breaking of joy is the beginning of wisdom."

They watched the monitor for a few moments. It showed the empty fields, the sky, the sun setting.

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"Everybody's dead," Elloran said tonelessly.

It was too big for fear. Sajit could feel nothing at all, not even the ache of emptiness. Even his hunger left him.

"The war's over," Elloran went on, "and now I have to go and deal with whoever it is who has made this. . . ."

He moved towards the displacement plate. Sajit knew he was going to go into the castle. "Don't do it!" he cried out. The sound rebounded like a broken whisperlyre. But he knew it was no use. He clutched his instrument and followed Elloran, hypnotized by the boy's eyes, the weary eyes of an old man.

A courtyard. Guards pacing. Sunset. Ahead, a towering portal flanked with iridescent columns, massive gateways inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

Elloran and Sajit stepped off the displacement plate. Guards wheeled, weapons pointing. They were surrounded.

"Laser them," Elloran hissed.

"But—"

"They're already *dead!*" Elloran ducked and Sajit opened his eyes wide and whirled, squeezing the power from them with the subvocalized words—

Sizzle, bisected bodies snapping, thudding.

"The castle." Elloran walked to the gates; they dissolved. They stepped into an Inquestral throne room.

It was a giant's domain. Flagstones, fire-etched marble from Ont, each four or five meters square, stretched out like a *makrugh* board. Columns topped with firefountains ringed them. Their footsteps shifted and echoed like the voices of ghosts. . . .

"Rainbow King!" Elloran shouted. His own voice returned, echo-rich, taunting. Above them a mobile of rainbows twirled slowly, layer upon layer of them crossing the hall's high ceiling, which glowed all over with soft prism-fringed light. "Rainbow King! Come out and meet your Inquestor and Envoy of the High Inquestors, messenger of Uran s'Varek!" Only echoes. It was as if they were inside a gigantic whisperlyre.

At the end of the hall was an empty throne.

"This is it, then," said Sajit. It was hard not to whisper. "This is the end. There's no one here."

"If we go out now and find the tachyon controls still working, I should be able to get us away from here," Elloran said hoarsely. It seemed so unsatisfying, to come here, to reach the lair of the Rainbow King, and to find only an empty castle . . . Sajit could not un-

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derstand his own disappointment. Why should he care? It was not his mission. It was not his quest.

"Let's look around a little more," said Sajit. They approached the foot of the throne, and he pointed to a displacement plate. They looked at each other for a moment. Sajit shrugged listlessly. "Why not?" They flicked out—

Another vast room, a perfect sphere a hundred meters high, walled with thousands upon thousands of interlocking hexagons, like a honeycomb . . . each hexagon was a two-dimensional monitor. The surface of the sphere was all gravi-down. Slowly they walked around. In the monitors—

Smiling children. Startling sunsets. Aerial views of villages, pretty patterns of white flecks in the greenery. Laughing old men telling tales around a table. Skies festooned with rainbows. Flocks of silverdoves, star-bright in the clear sky. A million eyes looking out on the planet of the dead.

In the center of the sphere, sitting in a hoverfloating throne, was an old man.

Elloran was white.

The hoverthrone drifted toward them. Sajit saw the old man's face, parched and pale under a wisp of white hair. And the eyes . . . where had he seen such terrible, haunted eyes before, such weary, sunken, despairing eyes?

"Loreh, Taanyel's son. My old pupil." The old man's voice was barely audible, as if he had not spoken for years. "After all this, they send me you. . . ."

Elloran said, "Ton Alkamathdes, I am Ton Elloran n'Taanyel Tath, Inquestor-who-is-to-be. You have broken the law, Ton Alkamathdes. You've created an illusory utopia. For what, Alkamathdes? You've" —his voice cracked, and Sajit was dismayed for a moment that he might burst into tears— "you've gone against everything that you taught me yourself, Ton Alkamathdes! How could you betray us all like this?"

"Loreh, Loreh" —Sajit saw Elloran flinch at the old man's use of the diminutive— "They were killing each other! There was so much hate here! All I did was wipe out the source of their hate, the other planet . . . what was wrong with that? We've destroyed a thousand planets for less . . . now they don't hate anymore. Now they love each other, all my children, and they live in paradise."

"You're a heretic—setting yourself up as god—killing without compassion—you're insane!"

"Insane?" Alkamathdes laughed, a dry, rasping sound like leaves

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in the wind. "I'm perfectly sane. But the Inquest, the Dispersal of Man, the human race—ha! ha!" He raised his hand and the throne came nearer still, hovering only a few meters from the two of them.

"I weep for you," said Elloran. But he did not weep.

Alkamathdes smiled, a twisted smile. "I took their murderous, selfish passions upon myself, Loreh. How can you say I was not compassionate? They did not have to kill anymore. I gave them freedom from their human condition . . . ." He gestured wildly at the scenes on the monitors. "My eyes, see! I see the joy in the world, and I am content that my children love me." He rose and stood at the foot of his hoverthrone, and Sajit saw that his shimmercloak was tattered and threadbare and had ceased to shine.

"I repeat the formula for your release from the Inquest, Alkamathdes, in the highspeech and the lowspeech," Elloran said steadily. "Listen and understand. *Den eis Enguester! Din rilacho st' Enguestaran! Evendek eká eis! Enguesti tembres! Enguesti dhandas!*" His voice rose. "You are no Inquestor! I release you from the Inquestors! You are alone forever! You are dark to the Inquest! You are dead to the Inquest!" The throne dove towards them like a pteratyger.

"You think you can stop me with words, with official formulas, Loreh? What empty ideas have they been feeding you? Look at me, I'm your teacher, your master. I know what is good for you. I'll send you home. Just keep quiet about this—"

"You had our ship destroyed!"

"Of course, of course, had to protect my children from you utopia destroyers. . . ."

"*Laser him, Sajit!*" The old man had raised up a hand to summon something—

Sajit glared at the old man and tried to subvocalize the word but the shimmercloak rippled through the tatters and he couldn't bring himself to—

"He's calling his dead guards, he's going to kill us!" Elloran screamed. Sajit raised his whisperlyre and threw it with his last strength at the old man's head, thinking *I can't be doing this I can't be attacking an Inquestor—*

Monitors splintered. Broken whisperstrings jangled. For a second the old man tottered, defying gravity. Then he crumpled from his throne. Sajit looked away.

Before the tears bleared his eyes, he saw in the monitors—

Children toppling in heaps, men and women collapsing in mid-action, machines grinding to a halt, a lone child plummeting from

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a treetop with a frozen smile—

The monitors went blank. The whole machinery must have been cued to the old man's brain-patterns. He had linked with the think-hive and now both were dead.

Elloran strode over to the limp form, crouched over the ragged body, and tore the shimmercloak from the body, ripping the fabric with a fierce, childish anger. He was screaming, "You betrayed me, Alkamathdes! I believed everything you taught me and you betrayed me!" He hammered the corpse with his fists again and again, like an automaton, until he was worn out, and Sajit realized slowly that he had killed an Inquestor.

Then Elloran drew himself up tall and straightened his shimmercloak and came to Sajit. He had composed his face now, and Sajit knew that he would never lose control of himself again. It was when he looked in Elloran's eyes that he remembered the eyes of the dead Inquestor. They were the same eyes, eyes of power and of tragedy.

Elloran said, "Now we can go and find the tachyon bubble system."

Sajit went to find his whisperlyre. It was broken beyond repair, so he laid it over the body and drew a fragment of faded shimmercloak over it. It had been the last link to his childhood. "There'll be others," Elloran said gently. "Now listen."

They faced each other in the huge chamber. A million blank hexagonal eyes stared at them from all sides. Sajit glanced at the body and shied away from it. Elloran said, "Sajit, I have hunted my first utopia. I am no longer an Inquestor-who-is-to-be. I have reached my power now. Do you know what that means, Sajit? Do you know what power means? This shall be my first act—" He held his hand out over Sajit. Instinctively Sajit knelt. "I name you to the clan of Shen, soldier Sajit. You are free from the wars now. I hope you'll be a great musician one day."

Sajit rose. He glowed with quiet elation. He wanted to embrace his companion, to thank him, to share this joy. But he couldn't.

Now they could not be friends. They could not touch. The illusion of utopia was over. The homeworld of the heart was for poets, for dreamers. Not for survivors. Sajit understood this.

So all he said was, "Thank you, Lord Inquestor. It's what I've always wanted." Then, impulsively, he added, "You have so much power, you Inquestors! You can make planets that conform to men's dreams, you can make my dreams come true. If only I were like you—"

In the huge chamber, over the Inquestor's body, they almost

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touched. Then Elloran said softly, "You don't understand, do you?" He sounded bitter. "It is *I* who wish—"

He stopped himself. Sajit knew that there were things Inquestors may not wish. That was how things were.

After a moment, to break the silence, Elloran said, "Shen Sajit, one day" —he laughed shyly— "I hope you will teach me that song."

"It will have to be soon," Sajit said, "before my voice changes." But he knew they were just acting now, clinging to the last moments of the utopia as the ear clings to a whisperlyre's shimmerfade after the song is done.

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THE SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR
by Erwin S. Strauss

Con(vention)s are popping out all over, so there's no excuse not to get out for a social weekend with your favorite SF authors, artists, editors and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. The hotline is (703) 273-6111. If a machine answers, leave your area code and number CLEARLY and I'll call back. When calling cons, give your name and reason for calling right away. When writing, enclose an SASE. Look for me as Filthy Pierre.

ConFusion. For info, write: **Box 1821, Ann Arbor MI 48106.** Or phone: **(313) 485-4824** (10 am to 10 pm only, not collect). Con will be held in: Ann Arbor MI (if location omitted, same as in address) on: 23-25 Jan., 1981. Guests will include: Barry (Momus) Longyear, Dave Innes, Gay Haledman. Masquerade, 24-hour parties, snow sculpture contest, banquet.

LastCon, (518) 434-8217. Albany NY, 23-25 Jan. Hal (Mission of Gravity) Clement, Jan Howard Finder. Masquerade, banquet, name-the-alien contest. Albany's 1st con since 1979.

AquaCon, Box 815, Brea CA 92621. (213) 399-5357. Anaheim (Disneyland) CA, 12-16 Feb. Philip Jose (Riverworld) Farmer, William Rotsler, Jan Bogstad & Jeanne Gomoll of JANUS.

Boskone, c/o NESFA, Box G, MIT PO, Cambridge MA 02139. 13-16 Feb. Tanith Lee, artist Don Maitz.

CapriCon, Box 416, Zion IL 60099. Evanston IL, 20-22 Feb. Terry Carr, J. R. & M. J. Holmes.

Stellar Con, c/o Allen, Box 4-EUC, UNC-G, Greensboro NC 27412. 27 Feb.-1 Mar. Masquerade. Participation by the S. C. A., who live medievally (e.g., leaders chosen by combat).

WisCon, c/o SF3, Box 1624, Madison WI 53701. (608) 233-0326 (eves), (608) 231-2916 (days). 6-8 Mar. C. Q. Yarbro, R. & J. Coulson, D. & E. Wollheim, T. DiLauretis, S. V. Johnson.

FanCon, c/o The Alliance, Box 1865, Panama City FL 32401. 6-8 Mar. At the Ramada Inn.

CoastCon, Box 6025, Biloxi MS 39532. (601) 374-3046. 13-15 Mar. Jerry (Mote in God's Eye, Lucifer's Hammer) Pournelle, Geo. Alec (Relations) Effinger, Jo (Diadem) Claton, the Pinis.

UpperSouthClave, Box U122, College Heights Station, Bowling Green KY 42101. 13-15 Mar.

MarCon, Box 2583, Columbus OH 43216. (614) 497-9953. 13-15 Mar. Andrew J. & Jodie Offutt, Bob & Anne Passovoy. This con is legendary among long-time fans. Intimate atmosphere.

SwannCon, c/o Conf. on the Fantastic, Coll. of Hum., Fla. Atl. Univ., Boca Raton FL 33431. (305) 395-5100, x2358. 18-21 Mar. John Barth, Brian W. Aldiss. Academic conference.

LunaCon, Box 204, Bkln. NY 11230. Hasbrouck Heights NJ (near New York City), 20-22 Mar. James White, Jack Gaughan. One of the oldest cons seems to have found a suburban home.

FoolCon, c/o JCCC, Overland Park KS 66210. 3-5 Apr. Kurtz, Cherryh, Asprin, Abbey, Kirk.

SatyriCon, Box 323, Knoxville TN 37901. 3-5 Apr. Andrew J. Offutt, Anne (Pern) McCaffrey.

WesterCon 34, Box 161719, Sacramento CA 95816. 4-6 Jul. C. J. Cherryh, Grant Canfield.

Denvention II, Box 11545, Denver CO 80211. (303) 433-9774. 3-7 Sep., 1981. C. L. Moore, C. Simak, R. Hevelin Ed Bryant. The 1981 World SF Con. Join by Mar. fo $35 (save $10).

WesterCon 35, Box 11644, Phoenix AZ 85064. (602) 249-3111. 2-5 Jul., 1982. Gordon Dickson.

ChiCon IV, Box A3120, Chicago IL 60690. 2-6 Sep., 1982. A. Bertram (Rim Worlds) Chandler, Kelly Freas, Lee Hoffman. The 1982 WorldCon. Go to other cons to prepare for WorldCons.

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LETTERS

As ever, we look forward to your letters. Letters to the editors should be addressed to us at Box 13116, Philadelphia PA 19101. Subscription matters, including changes of address, should go to Box 2650, Greenwich CT 06836. And letters for the attention of other departments of Davis Publications, Inc., such as display and classified advertising, should be addressed to 380 Lexington Avenue, New York NY 10017.

Letters on our newsstand distribution are always of great importance to us. Do let us know how we're doing out there!

If you want your address to appear at the end of your letter, should we publish your letter here, then put your address at the end of your letter. If you don't want your address published, then put the return address at the top of your letter; and we'll print only your name and your city and state.

—George H. Scithers

Dear Sirs,

This is a letter that I am very sorry to have to write; still, if I don't you may not get the negative feedback I believe your August issue deserves. I can only hope this is one of many letters you will receive regarding the obvious mismatch of *IA'sfm* and "Light on the Sound" by Sucharitkul.

I am not equipped to judge the literary merits of Mr. Sucharitkul's work; I'm sure he is a capable craftsman, a perceptive artisan, and kind to his mother. This particular piece, however, is as out of place as an ulcer at a chili cook-off.

Every SF magazine currently published has a flavor, a character that makes it an individual and creates for it a market and a following. *IA'sfm* has been unusually successful in molding a strong and clear character and so has enjoyed unusual success (although the Good Doctor's name didn't hurt either). Perhaps because of this success—I know it has spoiled me—this one misplaced story is so irritating.

I wish I could tell you exactly why this particular story seems so wrong for you. But, I just can't find the handle for it; like White Wine Sauce—it works or it doesn't.

Thank you all for an otherwise enjoyable magazine as well as

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your kind attention to this letter.

J. E. Pinkerton
San Diego CA

If you can't find the handle for it, that handle may not be there. Let the story lie fallow a while, then read it again. You may change your mind.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Good Dr.:

Just because your wife has this bizarre hangup over the double-**p** in her name, doesn't entitle her to inflict **p**-mania on the rest of us! After reading "A –estilence of –sychoanalysts" every word I say or think has an accentuated **p** in it. Do you know what it's like to go around **p**-ing like that? Is she trying to drum up business?

Otherwise, it was a great story. I enjoyed it immensely. You are right; your wife doesn't need your professional help with her writing. Is she under contract to George Scithers also, and why not?

Now why can't I get a person named D. Dunderdale out of my mind?

K. A. Boriskin
Framingham MA

Precisely the proper panoramic pattern of pressure provoked by "A P. of P."

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Gentle Editors:

We are going crazy!!! Will someone, *please,* PLEASE, tell us how to pronounce Somtow Sucharitkul's name?!? It is getting very tiring spelling it out constantly in casual conversation! Not only that, it's consuming all of our waking, and even our sleeping, time, trying to figure it out.

Waiting with tangled tongues,

Avis L. Burgess
RR5, Box 403
Penacook NH
Ginie Woodman
c/o Murphy, 3 Winsor Ave.
Concord NH 03301

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Try it this way: SOM-tow SUE-khar-IT-kull.

—Isaac Asimov

Isaac, that's not how to pronounce my last name! It's: sioux-char-WRIT-cool. Note difference in the second syllable.

—Somtow Sucharitkul

Dear Mr. Scithers:

Your magazine helped me feel at home when I changed jobs recently from public relations to technical documentation for a computer company. Several of my fellow employees were carrying copies of *IA'sfm* around to read at breaks and lunchtime.

We often discuss particular stories, and the consensus is that you publish an outstanding magazine month after month. Although I usually skip the nonfiction, my favorite feature in each issue is Dr. Asimov's editorial.

Please send me a copy of your discussion of manuscript format and story needs. And keep the great SF coming!

Sincerely,

Bonnie Vaughan
San Jose CA

Hold on to your job. You've hit upon an intelligent company.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov and Mr. Scithers:

I have subscribed to your magazine for the last 18 issues and have found the reading to be a joy. I have read every issue cover to cover, not from a sense of duty, but because of the pleasure the material offered. Unfortunately, I have just failed to completely read one issue. I refer to the August issue which I enjoyed as usual until I finished the first twenty pages of Sucharitkul's "Light on the Sound."

I have always been a bit impatient with Sucharitkul's stories; the Mallworld series in particular I find tedious and irksome. In his latest creation I found nothing to compel me to continue reading other than out of a sense of duty. After struggling through about one quarter of the story, I found myself wondering what was going on. Admittedly, I was fatigued for other reasons at the time, but I read for relaxation as well as challenge; and I do like to see some

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unity of presentation as opposed to seemingly random jumping from scene to unrelated scene, character to unrelated character. The author may have been attempting to build a gestalt or wholistic presentation, but I think he asks too much in expecting us to read to the 83rd page for the picture to finally come together.

Another irritant to "Light on the Sound" was Sucharitkul's tendency in some parts to forego the use of sentences. Yes, this can be argued either way from a stylistic viewpoint. I may be a bit touchy on this point since I demand that my students write their term papers using sentences, something all too many of them find difficult. I have enough problems defending to them why psychology term papers have to respect grammar rules, not being a class in English composition.

As I mentioned above, I find most of your stories to be entertaining, thought-provoking, and/or clever. Some are truly great, and you have received awards for them. So I can't really complain. But I've found that my silver cloud has some grey in it.

Yours truly,

Joseph G. Dlhopolsky, Ph.D.
27 Wilson Street
Port Jefferson NY 11776

Sometimes a particular author is an acquired taste. May I urge you to try Somtow again?

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Sirs,

Being from a rural area I've never had much access to a large amount of science fiction, but having been a long-time fan I've always read whatever I could get my hands on. So you can imagine my delight when my next-door neighbor came by to sell magazines for her class and on the list of selections was none other than *IA'sfm*. I bought a two year subscription, the most I could, on the spot.

Since then I have been more than happy with your publication and really enjoy the format: light-hearted but not silly. The cover illustrations are out of this world, and I think giving new writers an open invitation to submit stories is just fantastic (please send me a list of your manuscript needs).

As for the stories I love just about all of them except those idiotic puns; please spare us these intellectual insults. Among my favorite efforts are "If You Can Fill the Unforgiving Minute" by D's An-

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dreissen and Poyer, "The Hot and Cold Running Waterfall" from Mr. Tall, Barry B. Longyear's "Book of Baraboo," "Travels" by Carter Scholtz; and all of Somtow Sucharitkul's entries are simply brilliant. My mother especially likes your editorials.

I would like to ask, in closing, if the semi-nudity on the last issue's cover was some kind of trick to up newsstand sales (if so use full nudity, please).

Lee Suschinski
Sackett Harbor NY

I tend to appeal to mothers. I think it's my fatherly (but suave) attitude toward women.

Isaac Asimov

To Messrs. Asimov & Scithers:

I am writing in regard to Somtow Sucharitkul. I was immensely pleased with his two stories about Mallworld; esp. the latter about the clavichrome player. I recently finished "Light on the Sound." Again, I was favorably impressed. Today I received my October issue, and I noted that another one of his stories is included. I can hardly wait to read it. When can we expect Mr. Sucharitkul's first novel? Or, is there one out already? If so, then I want to read it. I have always enjoyed your magazine, but these last few issues stand out as my favorites. Thank you for introducing me to an excellent writer.

Sincerely,

Jane E. Keough

I've got to tell you that Somtow loves being called an excellent writer. He's funny that way. (So am I.)

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

I picked up the July issue of your magazine recently, and, although it was the first issue I've ever seen, I'm giving some thought to subscribing. I guess it was just by chance I picked it up, and I really didn't have any idea what it was about, except that it had "Isaac Asimov" on the cover, and it was the last one on the shelf. Having had much experience with your work, I knew I'd be foolish to leave it there all by its lonesome. So, with this in mind, I pulled out a

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dwindling money supply and headed directly to the checkout counter. What was most disappointing was that there was nothing in the way of fiction that was signed, "Asimov." Otherwise, I can say that I thoroughly enjoyed it, and I've been a fan of good science fiction for as long as I have been able to read it.

And now for the QUESTION: (and you knew it was coming), do you think it possible for a 13-year-old to contribute to such a monumental publication? That is a 13-year-old who gets A+'s in creative writing, does book reports and essays for pleasure (and leaves much to be desired in correct usage of language arts).

Sincerely,

Timothy Pyne
Covington, VA

There's nothing bigoted about us, Timothy. You send us a terrific science fiction story and I promise we won't ask any embarrassing questions about your age. But it's got to be terrific.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Isaac,

I have enjoyed your writing for more than half of my twenty years, and have enjoyed this magazine since issue number four. However, now I must pick some nits. Nit one: In John M. Ford's story "Hot Pursuit," why would Tan Aashe want to see ultra-violet light? Since ARGENT 7 makes the user heat up, I would think that Aashe would want to see *infra-red* light to track Covys.

And supposing that Aashe wanted to see in the ultra-violet, I doubt that putting the receptors behind the retina would work, because the lens absorbs most of the UV light; and what does get through, probably would not pass through the retina.

Nit two: Same author, same story.

How does one "exert fifty grams of effort"? Grams are a measure of *mass* not force. He should have exerted 0.49 Newtons of effort.

If any author is going to use the metric system, I wish that he/she would take the time to learn it first.

Yours truly,

Kevin Aylesworth
1348 North Point Dr.
Stevens Point WI 54481

Your points are well-taken. It is a pleasure to commit faux-pas, if

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only to observe the alertness of our readers.

—Isaac Asimov

The author regrets that Mr. Ayleworth's enjoyment of his story was spoiled. However:

1) There are indeed such things as UV photomultiplier devices for night detection. And the phrase "behind the retina" refers to the spot where the optic nerve endings are located, rather than in the vitreous humor of the eyeball. Okay?

2) Grams refer to a scalar quantity while Newtons indicate a vector, or signed quantity. I specified only the scalar component—not to mention making myself clear to more readers than had I used the less-well-known (if perhaps more correct) term.

I learned the MKS system quite a long time ago, and had it pounded in firmly almost a decade back by the Indiana University School of Physics. Catching us out at our errors is fair, if unpleasant; being accused of fundamental ignorance on the basis of a single story is neither pleasant or fair. Even Larry Niven once rotated the Earth the wrong way.

—John M. Ford

NEXT ISSUE

The 16 March 1981 issue of *IA'sfm* will offer a *tour de force* (or—ahem—*forces*) by Ted Reynolds, "Through All Your Houses Wandering," with a cover by Wayne Barlowe. Also in the issue is a new short story by R. A. Lafferty, "New People," as well as new works by Melisa Michaels and Sydney Van Scyoc, among others. In addition to the usual book reviews, puzzles, and editorials, we'll also have a look at upcoming SF films, and a discussion of SF workshops. On sale 17 February 1981. Don't miss it!

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We allow you at least 10 days for making your decision. If you do not receive the form in time to respond within 10 days, and receive an unwanted Selection, you may return it at our expense.

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